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Shooters are good and good for you, too!

18 Letters

You love us, you really love us. And we love you, too. It's so beautiful that we can communicate this way. Kisses!

22 Radar

It's a crazy world out there, and we've got the inside scoop on all the big news. Warner Brothers is actually making sure that publishers are making good games for a change, we find out what the ESRB is up to, and we go to the seedy underground of the MMO drug scene. Think you've seen it all? You haven't. So flip over to Radar section already will ya?

32 Previews

Our Previews section comes down with a case of sequelitis this month, with everything from Prince of Persia 2 to The Longest Journey's successor. And if that's not enough, we've got a hands-on look at Kohan II: Kings of War, plus Myst IV: Revelations, Dark Fall: Lights Out, and the fuzzy-wuzzy critters in Zoo Tycoon 2.

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COVER STORY

Bullet Time

Doom 3 and Half-Life 2 are coming soon, and like you, we can't wait. But there are a lot more awesome shooters in the pipeline, too, including Monolith's stunning new F.E.A.R. We've got the exclusive first look at that game, plus a host of other shooters guaranteed to blow you away.

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70 Reviews

This month, we've got the full details on Eidos' stealth-action sequel *Thief: Deadly Shadows*, as well as the massive tactical warfare extravaganza that is *Joint Operations*. The perverted Sims-philes among you can share in our bitter hatred of *Singles: Flirt up Your Life*, and then we've got Wil's kid's review of *Shrek 2*. 'Cause we were too embarrassed to review it ourselves.

79 Tech

Wil takes the Tech section back to school with tips and products that any self-respecting gamer will need to know about this fall. We review everything from a \$1,000 desktop PC from iBuyPower to Toshiba's latest media center laptop. Plus, Loyd Case has his usual words of wisdom for the kids.

79



93 Check Out

Well, this is it—next month, we're unveiling a fresh new look for Check Out with lots of all-new content! In the meantime, we've got more hardware recommendations for you, along with our usual review archive and this month's editors' picks, courtesy of Darren "I love this game so much I broke 15 mice because of it" Gladstone.

104 Tom vs. Bruce

The tension is high as Tom tries to slaughter Bruce in *Warlords: Battlecry III* fast enough to make it to his hot date on time.

108 Scorched Earth

King of the castle!

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The all-new 1UP is here, and it's exploding with new features! We've still got all of that great daily content you've come to know and love, but we're now the first-ever destination for gamers to meet, play, get informed, and show off.

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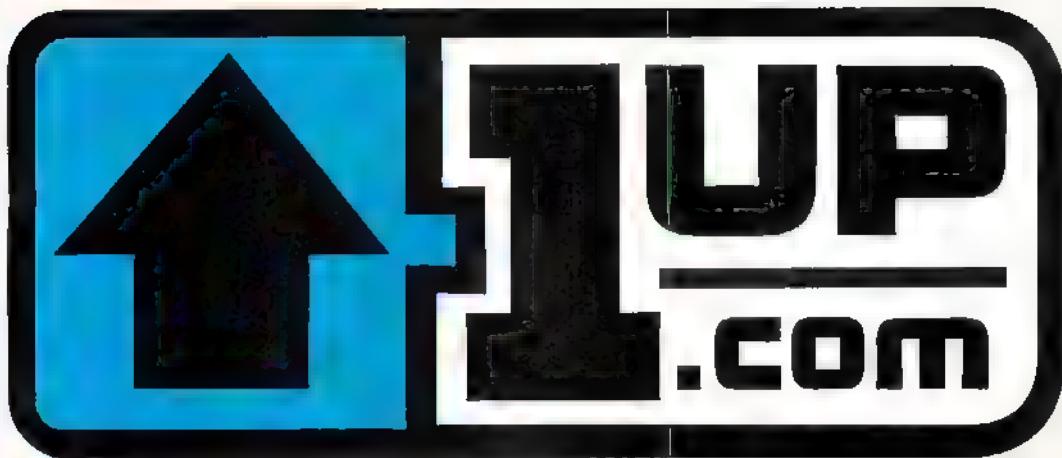
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Killjoys

Shooty shooty bang bang!!

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The first-person shooter is both the albatross and the savior of PC gaming. It's the albatross because it's the genre that always garners all the negative press about gaming, the one that shows up on the nightly news and makes people believe that gamers are all social deviants, despite the fact that most are actually just 50-year-old housewives playing checkers online. It's the savior, on the other hand, because to this day, it's still the one type of game that the PC unequivocally pulls off better than any other gaming system. The keyboard/mouse controls, the higher-resolution graphics, and the LAN and broadband multiplay still make the PC far more effective for this type of game than the consoles. Which is why even the most dedicated console gamers can also be found playing *Battlefield Vietnam* or drooling in anticipation over those two upcoming PC behemoths *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*. This month's cover story focuses on some incredible new PC shooters coming your way, including some, like Monolith's *FEAR*, that pose a serious challenge to those two giants. No, there probably isn't a Nobel Peace Prize winner in the bunch, but, you know, when's the last time a Nobel Peace Prize winner ever squished an alien's head open with a crowbar?

I rest my case.



KRISTEN SALVATORE
MANAGING EDITOR

Kristen Salvatore is the managing editor of CGW. What does a managing editor do? Well, she manages. And edits. And manages the editors. Basically, she keeps this creaky ship afloat, against all odds, and keeps her sense of humor, too. We are not worthy.



ROBERT COFFEY
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Robert Coffey is CGW's executive editor in charge of reviews and features, and he's the one who's usually sitting in the back called "Smartie Pant." Robert has had both scalded fever and a cold this year. Next up: the dark plague.



DARREN GLADSTONE
SENIOR EDITOR

The harder-working man in computer gaming, Darren Gladstone is the senior editor in charge of our infy 'Blast' section, a chop shop of all-game-related (and some not-so-related) news, tidbits, and various other detritus that is what we don't know where else to put. King of like Darren himself.



WILLIAM O'NEAL
TECH EDITOR

William O'Neal is CGW's technical editor, handling all things hardware and gadget-related. Check out his cool "Back to School" feature this month, with recommendations for everything you kub need for avoiding your upcoming work. And read his son's *Street Fighter* review!



JOHNNY LIU
PREVIEWS EDITOR

Johnny Liu is CGW's stalwart preview editor, searching the globe far and wide for new PC games for you to play. He is also the only editor in CGW history to pull away an entire double porterhouse steak in one sitting. At least he let them cook it first.



RYAN SCOTT
CD ROM EDITOR

Ryan Scott is the former CGW intern who done good and got himself a full-time position here, proving that even the greatest of guys can get lucky sometimes. Ryan puts together our lame CD ROM party mix, and also runs the CGW '96 edition. Since he will rule the planet.



ROB SCHULTZ
ART DIRECTOR

Rob Schultz is CGW's art director, making all of the words we write and making it all look good. Kind of like the guy arranging the deck chairs on the *Titanic*. Or, maybe the interior decorator at a home for the criminally insane. Either way, we never feel so pretty.



MICHAEL JENNINGS
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR

Michael Jennings, CGW's multitalented associate art director is the other reason why this magazine looks so dang good. He is the yin to Rob's yang, the lar to Rob's chi, the marco to Rob's polo. They are two large brains, operating as one giant superbrain. We love them.

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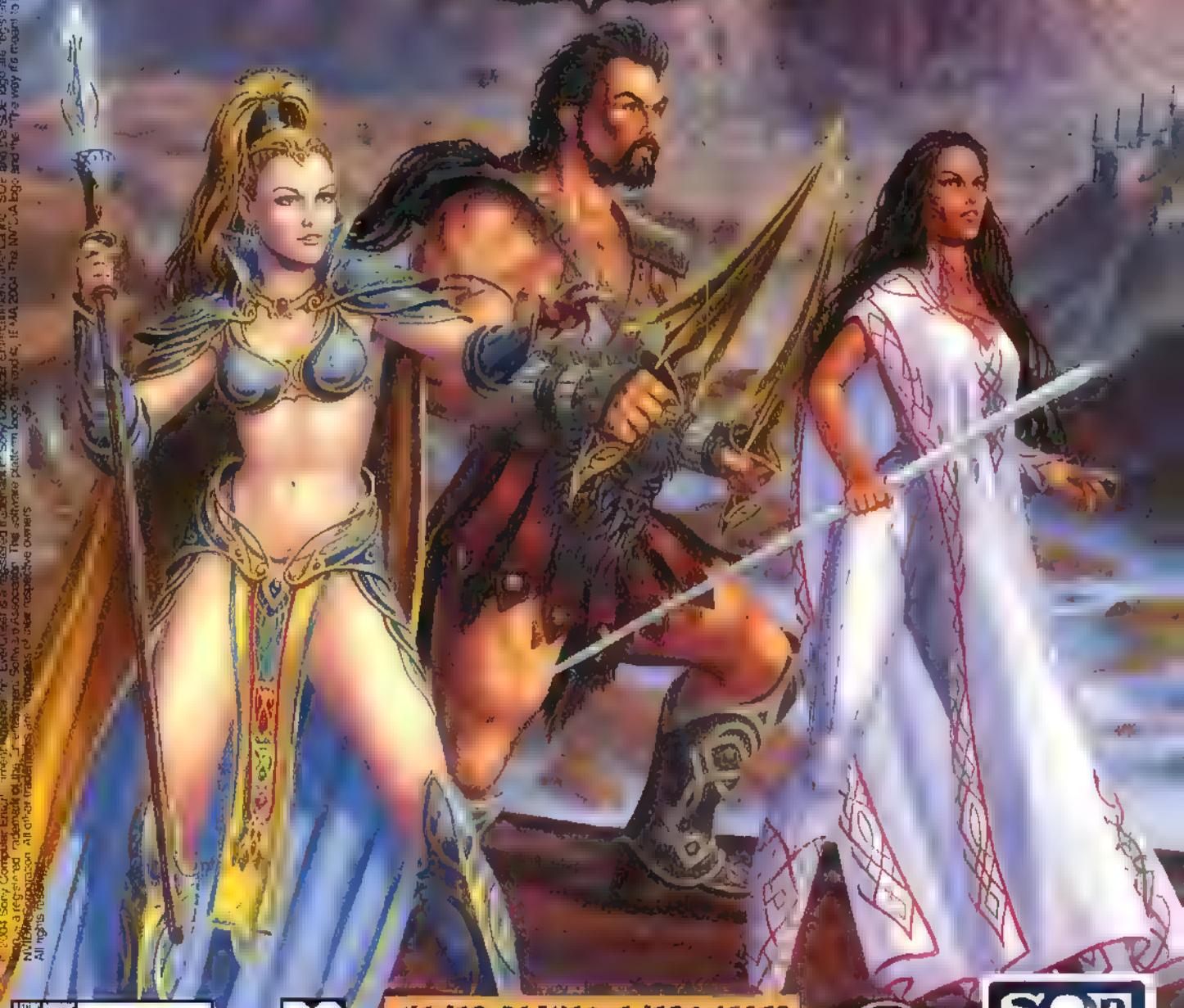
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Letters

Snappy answers to stupid questions

It's Calgon time

Do you want somebody to save you and take you away from here? 'Cause it's so lonely inside and so busy out there. If you're looking for someone who cares, click below

Michel Massey



Oh my God, it's like you can see into our very souls! Yes, please, please, please take us away, our insides are so very, very lonely. Oh, wait a minute...we're just

hungry. Are you a corn dog salesman, Michel? 'Cause that sounds really good right about now. That and some pudding. Lots and lots of pudding.

Real estate agents of the old republic

Recently, I reinstalled *Fallout 2* and started to play it once again. Then I read your magazine and noticed that *KOTOR2* is coming out next year. I enjoyed *KOTOR* but felt ripped off. Being generous, there are just eight locations to explore and do things in. In *Fallout 2*, there are at least 15 locations, not including places like SAD or some random encounters. Why do magazines like yours support this limited gameplay? We don't need, or want, something like *Morrowind*, but I sure want more than four major areas to explore. It is time we gamers start to demand longer playing experiences for our hard-earned dollars.

John Urbanik

We support this limited gameplay because a) we don't feel it's so limited, and b) we feel it's so packed with fun, replayability, and gameplay options that even if it were lacking in real estate (and we don't think it is), it still would be so damn fun that we wouldn't care.

Picture Imperfect

Hello. On page 121 of your June 2004 issue, you had a little bit of info about *The Sims Online*. I am writing to inform you that this screenshot is not from *The Sims Online*. Rather, it is from some sort of *Star Wars* game. Thanks!

Revan

Mail Bites

As I read the July Scorched Earth, I began to wonder if Denis Leary was now under the employment of Ziff Davis and that Robert Coffey was merely his screen name.

—Mark Fischer

Is it just me, or does anyone else want to see Jeff Green in a fuzzy pink bunny rabbit suit?

—Jordan "Jordy" Frezberg

Don't Know Much About History

While your preview editor waits for his first public hair to sprout, he might want to go back to WWII school. Your preview of *Call of Duty: United Offensive* in the July issue identifies it clearly as an "Allied," not "Axis" game, so we won't be "running to different stations to down enemy Spitfires," unless we're determined to get court-martialed on our return. Also, I suppose we ought to thank God he wasn't in charge of air defense during the big one, as in the photo caption he identifies "Stukas" as "Spitfires." Just sayin'.

DA



ASIAN

Thanks for letting us know, Revan! Here's the screenshot we meant to run. Our apologies.



We feel your pain

Pardon me for crying a river, but when you review a game such as *Painkiller*, isn't the game supposed to actually work? Having not gotten any new games for a while and being a longtime subscriber, I decided to look through your reviews to find a game to buy. *Painkiller* caught my eye, and I bought it. Unfortunately, it does not work on either of my fairly high-end Dells, including one that is about two weeks old. It simply will

not start up, even after numerous visits to the tech-support forum and completely messing with my tech support. All I am saying is, what happened to the days when buggy games got bad reviews just for being buggy? A realistic physics engine and fun shoot-em-up style go only so far when the only game graphics I see is a tiny error message 10 minutes after trying to load the game. *Painkiller* is a huge pain in the ass, and DreamCatcher ought to catch a lawsuit.

Tha Predator!

We have to say, Tha, that we encountered no such problems on the different systems we played it on. The culprit may be a really weird one—the play disc is actually the third disc, not the first one. This might be your problem.

Freedom's Just another word

I was reading the June 2004 Tom vs. Bruce section, when they got around to playing CTF (the two were going at it *UT2004* style). Bruce claimed to have lost 1

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LOSE.**

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because he burned his flag, causing his victory to be deemed "unconstitutional."

At this point, I'd like to point out that First Amendment rights allow Bruce to burn his flag as he wants and still be completely eligible to win.

Max Nied



Thanks for making such an excellent point, Max. We're big supporters of all Americans' First Amendment rights here at CGW. We are not big supporters of vicious pit vipers.

Chicks with clicks

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you for that great article on checkpoint saves (July 2004 issue). After struggling through *LOTR ROTK* on PC and *777* on Xbox, I couldn't agree more. The whole point of gaming is—now hold on to your hats—it's supposed to be fun! Yes, fun! But when some idiot sitting in his leather armchair swigging his Sobe Lite decides that He Is God and save games will happen only when He decides, rather than us poor schmos who shelled out the greenbacks to play said game, then it's a frustrating circle of hell, and nothing short of all the makers of EA Games suddenly dropping dead from heart attacks will make up for lost time (and lost fun). Fact is, I have moved every single character up to the highest level in *ROTK* except for that stupid Aragorn/Gimli/Legolazy in the King of the Dead, who are holding me back from actually seeing Frodo finish the business at hand. Argh! This coming from the same gal who probably saved every second of every *Tomb Raider* game, from health-pack pickups to found secrets, and finished with something absurd like 3,572 saves. But at least I finished those games. *ROTK* now sits on my shelf collecting dust (next to the impossibly stupid *Tomb Raider 6: The Angel of You-Know-What*), and I have now resigned myself to the fact that I will never get out of the King of the Dead level. Curse you, EA Games! And, on the subject of fun, I'd like to ask the head honchos of the disaster that was *Tomb Raider 6*: Why, oh why did you take away Lara's unlimited pistol

firepower? I miss being able to fall back on my reliable safety net after abusing my supply of shotgun shells. And what's up with Lara's sudden inability to cling forever on a ledge? Sometimes I have to make a decision, and I don't want to fall because I took too long crossing a chasm. Bring back the fun! On a lighter note, I first found out about *Armed and Dangerous* in the March 2004 issue, and I have to say I liked the write-up so much that I bought the game—and it's the most gun fun I've had in a long time. Roman and his Lionhearts kick ass on a take-no-prisoners, laugh-out-loud gun rampage. I've played it through twice already! So beware, all you gamemakers producing hard-to-play, nonsavable, forehead-vain-popping games packaged as fun and thrilling action play, for this game girl will not be buying. Yeah! I said "Game Girl." I know, I'm a rare breed!

Tanya Z.

Not that rare a breed, Tanya—read on!

OK, so I don't have a tattoo showing what a geeky gamer I am (Lord Chariot is a little scary, eh? No, I'm not Canadian), I never played *Asteroids* on the MIT mainframe or *Oubliette* on Plato in the late '70s (I hadn't been born yet), and I'm not a wannabe (because I don't know any girl gamers to "wannabe" like), but I'm definitely a gaming geek. I was there to receive the Golden Mop award. I read the cheesy programmer's note on the "brick" wall (which merely looked like green X's on the screen), I spent quality time (and quarters) in arcades in the '80s. I saved the princess who was in a freakin' other castle (stupid wimpy princess...). I blew the millions of hell and Nazis (not much difference) into little pieces. I kissed frogs and tickled whales' tongues. I am a friend of Atrus and slayer of dragons. I was a cybernetic master chief out to keep the Covenant forces from finding Earth. I knocked the crap out of *Diablo* and *Baal* and discovered alien artifacts. I've slaughtered ringwraiths and been attacked by a thousand Agent Smiths. True gamers aren't just those poor guys who refer to Lara Croft as their girlfriend and make lame jokes about *Cthulhu*... We all just have a blast doing what we do—cept the odds are slightly more in my favor of finding someone of the opposite sex who likes games as much as I do (and isn't pixelated). Heh heh heh...

Danielle West

Mail Bites

Coffey, you have made me feel so much better for usually opting for the easy mode.

—Grannlegamer on 1UP.com

Does anyone else want a Simon Bolivar RTS game?

—ColonelAurellanoBuendia



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Radar

The price is right



If the rest of game industry worked this way, here's how much we would've fined some notable duds (plus landfill costs for disposing of all copies).



The End of Bad

Warner Bros. to penalize abysmal licensed titles



Clint Robot
It's a towering automaton on the horizon for PlanetSide. We are the future.



Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas
San and if you don't know how to drive, it's a bummer.



Inte-RIP-ley
2003's 100+ games were followed once great publisher Interplay in its various ventures.



Movie Games?

To say that Atari's *Enter the Matrix* was a disaster is being kind, but more than 5 million people worldwide still got suckered into buying it. On GameRankings.com, a site that posts aggregate review scores for games, *Enter the Matrix*'s average score across all platforms is a rip-roaring 68.9 percent. According to Warner Bros.' newly instituted royalty policy, developers will be forced to pay increased royalties if their titles are panned. The further away from 70 percent the scores are, the higher the penalty.

"Did [*Enter the Matrix*] sell that many units because Warner Bros. spent \$100 million on marketing?" ponders Jason Hall, senior VP of Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. "Or did it really sell based on people thinking 'This game is awesome and it's doing well for the brand?'" Warner Bros. is determined to change the industry's perception of its movie-licensed videogames.

One notable supporter of this move is Electronic Arts. "[Warner Bros.] policy is good for the consumer," says Jeff Brown, VP of corporate communications for EA, "good

"I think it's a very noble way of trying to protect your intellectual property."

for the license, and good for the entire [game] industry."

Industry reaction has been mixed. Atari CEO Bruno Bonnell made his disapproval clear in a *Hollywood Reporter* story in late May, stating he would "never, ever sign this sort of agreement." When asked to elaborate, an Atari spokesperson responded, "Bruno's really said all he plans to on this subject."

Calls placed to Bam Entertainment, THQ, and Ubisoft—all Warner Bros. licensees—were met with similar results. Sega, on the other hand, collaborating with Warner Bros. on *The Matrix Online*, has

announced its support. "I can totally understand why someone like Jason would do that," says Scott A. Steinberg, Sega's VP of entertainment marketing. "I think it's a very noble way of trying to protect your intellectual property."

What about when a title doesn't win over the press but consumers are happy? The policy guidelines take this into consideration, weeding out extreme cases of exploitation. "[Warner Bros.] needs to understand that some genres appeal to game critics more than others," says Brown.

"The whole point is making sure the eye is on the ball when it comes to quality," says Hall. "The point's not numbers. The point is making sure that this is a focus of theirs, that they understand it's very important to us."

Who watches the watchmen?

The other obvious concern is whose reviews will weigh heavily for Warner Bros.

I think any company that signs with Warner Bros. needs a clear definition of what it would be judged by," says Sam Kennedy, Editor in Chief of IUP.com. According to Hall, they will. In a recent case, a publisher picked its five favorite

publications to produce the average for its next WB-based title.

A side effect of the policy is more power in the hands of reviewers and there are rippling fears that publications will be pressured about scores. "I'd imagine many public relations departments will start being a lot more picky about their review list for the licensed titles," a public relations rep whispered anonymously. "You may see a new level of lobbying or sucking up to these [reviewers]."

The flip side may be that only magazines that promise good scores will garner the scoops. "We've already had instances where companies have essentially demanded review scores of a certain level in exchange for exclusivity," admits Kennedy. Rumors circulate that some magazines have already succumbed to these shady tactics, including one publication that guaranteed a positive game review in exchange for a cover story.

Whether or not the policy changes the quality of future Warner Bros. products is unknown, but even Hall admits this isn't a quick fix. "Give us a few years," says Hall, "and you'll start to see the results of this intent on." Worst case scenario for us: If more good games result, we won't be able to dish out as many low scores every month. Now where's the fun in that? **Patrick Klepek**

IUP.com is a Ziff Davis web site.

Size Matters

World's smallest first-person shooter in beta

Relatively big things are coming from a very small package: *.kkrieger* is a first-person shooter that you can download in the time it took you to read this sentence. OK, probably quicker.

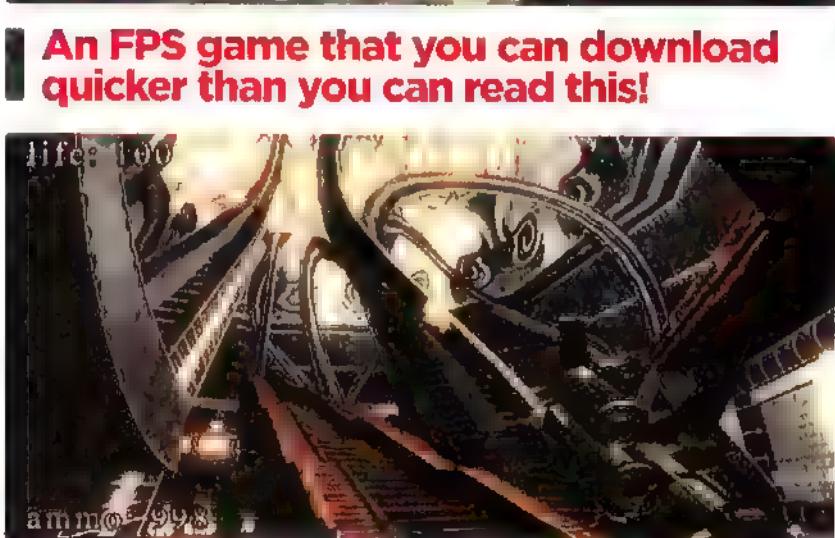
.kkrieger was created by a group called *theprodukt*, which consists of a handful of guys from Hamburg, Germany whose goal was to create the smallest, good-looking FPS game they could and to submit it to the Breakpoint 2004 competition earlier this year. Miss on accomplished: They won.

The project began four years ago when Thomas "fiver2" Mahike noticed that when using traditional painting programs, he needed just a few simple primitives and filters to create very realistic textures. That's where the hardcore coding came in: *theprodukt* worked to create an easy-to-use editor for artists, and the results were amazing—just a few hundred bytes are needed for a texture, and there are no visible compression artifacts.

The editor is the key to *[.kkrieger's]* quality," says Dierk "Chaos" Ohlrich. Ohlrich, who serves as a full-time game developer and does this as a side project, created the *Werkzeug* editor that makes the game possible. "After all," he adds, "artists can code; they need a good tool to make good graphics."

As Ohlrich explains it, there are two parts of *.kkrieger*'s code: the editing tool and the final 96K executable file. The original source code is huge, but it is deconstructed into procedural modules. All that information is compressed into a 96K executable file. What exactly does this mean to you besides fast downloads? Well, it opens the door for elegant programming that doesn't require massive installs. Unlike the multigigabyte monstrosities we've seen in the office (Five CDs to install a game? Sheesh!)

The next step for *theprodukt* is to produce a bug-fixed version of the game with more content. Ultimately, Ohlrich says that the group wants to work on the technology as it works on volumes two and three. After that, who knows? There's talk of creating a full price game or just selling their technology. Not bad for a project done in their spare time. ■ Darren Gladstone



An FPS game that you can download quicker than you can read this!



**NEWS
FEED**

Storms offline: VT Games announced at press time that adventure game pioneer Storms shut its doors in June, laying off all of its 350 employees. Who will make our Hoyle card games now? >>

5, 10, 15 Years Ago In CGW

What we said when you were nursing.



5 Years Ago, September 1999

We had only nine friggin' titles to review five years ago and 178 pages of magazine to fill—what were we to do? We decided to do a 100 Hot New Games cover story. Among our picks: *Team Fortress 2*, *Loose Cannon*, *SimMars*, *Orcs: Revenge of the Ancient*, *Werewolf*, *The Heart of Gala*, and *Star Trek: New Worlds*. These games never shipped. OK, a whole bunch of *Star Trek: New Worlds* boxes ended up in stores, complete with CD-ROMs containing graphics and sounds and stuff, but an actual game? No game there, my friend, none at all.



10 Years Ago, September 1994

Hey, whaddya know! Another big upcoming games roundup feature! When something works, you stick with it...or keep doing it until you get it right. Anyway, the "interactive film" fad was blossoming, and we covered *Wing Commander III* and its star Mark Hamill, *The Daedalus Encounter* and its star Tia Carrere, and *Phantasmagoria* and its star—a couple of naked bouncing boobies and a naked butt. At least they were real boobies and butt and not the creepy digitized plastic of *Singles: Flirt Up Your Life!*



15 Years Ago, September 1989

We ran a dedicated Industry News section back in the olden days. Fifteen years later, those two pages read like a graveyard with New World Computing, Infocom, Mediagentic, Broderbund, Micropose, GEnie, Prodigy, Spectrum Holobyte, and others all having died off. Perhaps Scorpia summed it up best in her *Curse of the Azure Bonds* review when she said, "In the sewers below Tilverton, a number of Otyughs have made their home." OK, maybe not



Back in BUSINESS

NCsoft hires the hero of *Might and Magic*

When we spoke with Van Canghoven back in April (CGW #237, p. 40), he seemed adamant: SDO had torpedoed the once-great *Might and Magic* and *Heroes of Might and Magic* series; yet here we are, a month later, talking to him in his new role as executive producer for NCsoft.

Since the SDO days, Van Canghoven had tried to build an MMO title. He had settled on playing them by trial and error. Months of retirement found myself playing all of the MMO games out there, as well as some of the NCsoft titles. Along the way, he had learned a few things: what he would make better, what he would make worse, and what he would make better.

He wants to bring that trial-and-error experience online. "EverQuest became the standard for MMOs. It's a very sophisticated game, but it's also useful. As a result, few companies go beyond the EQ formula. I'm thinking of Van Canghoven."

What lessons does he have to offer? "In the past, I've spoken too soon, and people have either copied or built on our own ideas...so I can't say much yet." What Canghoven has promised, though, is that he's working on the next big thing. The game, he says, will reach a broader audience and that whether you play it for five or 10 hours a week, he wants to deliver something new and interesting every day that you log on. Says Canghoven, "I'll introduce a whole new way of playing MMOs that just hasn't been done before." —Daren Glabson

NEWS

FEED A survey of 2,219 PC gamers found that 52% have copied software; 33% of those had copied full CD images. (Mark's talk: *Shit/Sheet*; Nov. 16-17 in MA until fall 2004.) *Deon* is right: *Human Beast* *Deon* ships on August 11.

WarCraft Maps Go Mod

Mapmakers create new ways to play WC3

WarCraft III is evolving from the game you bought a couple years ago—no, not just on its about-shrinking-green-elves-and-scouting-cards-right-alives-anywhere. Thanks to user-made maps, whole new game types are being introduced. Just log on to Battle.net, join the game of someone who's playing a custom-map mod, and enjoy the whole new game that's automatically downloaded. And we've got four that map-makers made lookin' good and smokin' hot. They mean that make up for in creativity and originality. —Alex Hendry

Defense of the Ancients

What It Is: Choose three and fight amongst three choke points along a team simple enough, doesn't it? What It Isn't: An RTS game. This is combat-RPG with all the trappings. Why We Like It: Modders of DOTA, featuring amazing new heroes with cooler new spells, but beware of unbalanced versions. WarCraft III, \$20, www.w3c.com



Run Panda Run v 1.3

What It Is: A 2D action game where you run through a secured facility, holding off mat kill you by anyone. What It Isn't: If you go, you're gonna die. It's a 2D action game, the middle finger, and you'll be sure to get killed. Why We Like It: You'll be sure to get killed.



Skibi Castle TD 5.7

What It Is: A 2D tower defense game with dozens of mini-games between each round. What It Isn't: It's not like you've never seen a tower defense game.



Grand Theft Auto 2K v 1.65

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**Blood and Gore
Language
Violence**

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■ GET OUT

Bomb Scare Is No Game

Grand Theft Auto blamed for man's inability to hit Pause

Lesson learned most recently by Anthony S. Jones of Jacksonville, FL: When you're on the phone, stop playing games. Late one Sunday night this May, Jones, 27, called in to the Cross Creek Barbecue, where he worked as a cook. While talking with a coworker, Jones alleges he was playing *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. The result of that phone call landed Jones in jail with felony charges and no chance to reset the game.

Apparently, it was all just one big misunderstanding. You see, when he shouted, "There's a bomb in the building! There's a bomb in the building! Everyone needs to get out!" he was talking to a child that was playing the game with him at a friend's house. Rather than getting an answer to the obvious question—why he was playing any *GTA* game with a child—he'll have to settle on why he'd call and say this the first place.

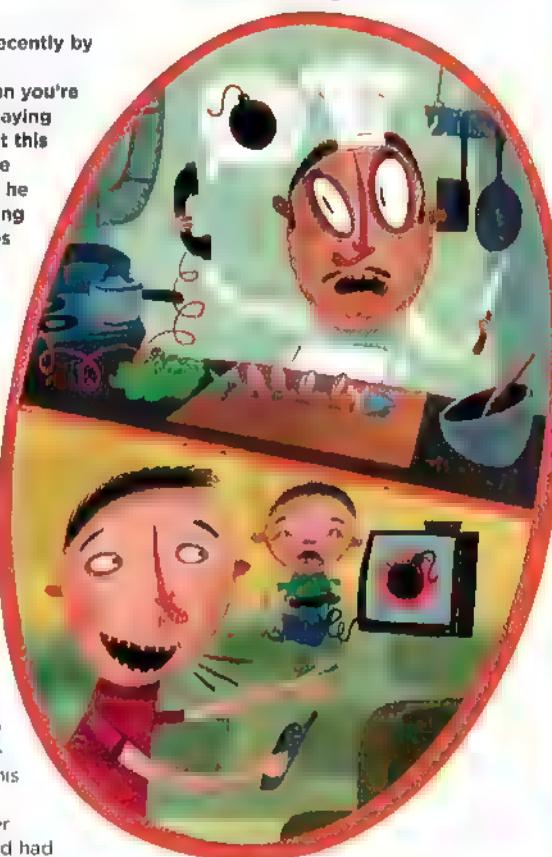
The coworker on the receiver heard the threat, panicked, and had the night manager report it to 911. It is unclear as to how long Jones was on the phone or if he even identified himself on the phone. The manager at the restaurant was unavailable for comment when we went to press, but according to Ken Jefferson—a spokesperson for the Jacksonville, FL, police department—Jones simply called, made the threat, and hung up. Hence the need for a phone trace that led to Jones' friend's house, where he was allegedly playing the game. "I've never heard of anything like this happening before," Jefferson adds.

When found, Jones was arrested for making a false report about planting a bomb or explosive, a second-degree felony. As we go to press, Jones is being

held in lieu of \$5,003 bail. His case is being brought to trial, and if he's found guilty, he can face a maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison. ■ Darren Gladstone

If the Game Don't Fit, You Must Acquit

An online petition has already formed to free Anthony S. Jones. Do you think that he was unjustly arrested? Or do you think he should serve 15 years in jail for allegedly playing *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*? See the petition for yourself at www.petitiononline.com/anthony/petition.html.



The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

News and views from the Wild West

The Good: *SWAT 4* Returns

After one of the best tactical, squad-based shooter franchises around finally showed signs of life again after a long time in development hell, now in the hands of the megatalented Irrational Games (*System Shock 2*, *Freedom Force*), *SWAT 4* wowed us in a recent demo with a butt-simpler control scheme that sacrificed none of the tactical complexity. Oh yeah, and there's even a multiplayer mode.

The Bad: RPG Drought

Remember RPGs, yeah, neither do we. Because it's been a long time since we've had a good one. Well, OK, not that long—*War of the Worlds* was just last year and that was one of the best RPGs ever. Still, there was a time when massive story and quest-based RPGs ruled the PC, and right now, today, while we're feeling all nostalgic and wistful, we miss that time. An *Ultima*, *Dragon Quest*, *Ah, Ultima*, *Ah, Ultima*...we miss that time.

The Ugly: Sierra Shut Down

And now, just 10 minutes following on the heels of the closings of *Papyrus* and *Impressions* studios, Vivendi Universal continues the gutting of its ailing gaming empire with the closing of its Bellevue, WA, offices—former home and headquarters of the legendary Sierra Online, makers of many of the best PC games ever made. Vivendi says the Sierra name will live on, but this is the end of the line for the old *Sierra*.

IRON GIANTS

Big Mech Attack

PlanetSide Daily News

JUNE 16, 3047

GIANT ROBOTS INVADE!



New technology pushes interstellar arms race

BY DARREN GLADSTONE

AMERISH, EMERALD SERVER—Earlier today, giant robots were sighted all over Aurexis. “As soon as that...that thing came up over the hill near Kyo, I knew that we were in a world of trouble. We hadn’t gone up against anything like this before,” said one member of the Terran Republic who wished to remain anonymous.

For more than a year now, the war-torn world has been rocked by three factions—the New Conglomerate, Terran Republic, and Vanu Sovereignty—vying for control. In that time, the arms race has escalated with new ground and air vehicles (through regular content updates), the discovery of alien technology (in the *Core Combat* expansion), and now three different types of BFRs (battleframes or, we assume, Big F-king Robots) entering the fight.

MUTUALLY ASSURED DESTRUCTION

This next stage of the war is a logical one, according to David Georgeson, lead designer of *PlanetSide*. “I’ve worked on a bunch of these giant-robot games [such as Activision’s *Heavy Gear*]. Here we went with smaller-scale robots that are like heavy tanks—only better.”

Standing about 20 meters tall, these BFRs will be able to turn the tide in battles and, according to Georgeson, “will finally help the game feel even more like sci-fi than some near-future combat game.” Each faction gets a unique chassis that can be customized. Attach the immolation cannon and then drive while a gunner makes with the devastation. Yank out the gunner’s seat and you’ve got yourself a nimble fighter with jump jets. All told, there will be five pilot-controlled weapons, two to three gunner-controlled heavy weapons, and a slew of upcoming enhancement pods. Each chassis is yours to tweak as you see fit, and you can save different loadouts for different combat occasions. For instance, there are NTU siphons that drain energy from enemy outposts, and we hear that a cloaking device is in development.

The New Conglomerate’s Peregrine model

will resemble, as Georgeson calls it, a chicken walker. (For all you nerds out there, think AT-STs from *Star Wars*.) These mechs sport plenty of firepower.

True to the Terran Republic credo, their Colossus BFR is a squat terror. Among its heavy weapons will be rocket pods that behave like those you see in anime movies, with dozen of rockets sprouting out and spiraling toward targets.

The Vanu’s Aphelion battleframe is the only one that looks humanoid—and it might remind you of *Macross* robots. Relying on the plasma immolation cannon and a continuous beam laser, this is probably the one to watch out for.



beams laser, this is probably the one to watch out for.

NEW TACTICS REQUIRED

One thing that all the robots will have in common is shielding. That’s right, these monstrosities are nearly unstoppable. The generators on their backs mean they can sustain multiple blows from multiple flail-artillery shots without a scratch. But get this—the shields can’t repel small-weapons fire. Which means that while these things are imposing, a well-aimed sniper shot can take down a battleframe’s shields.

What’s it gonna take to play? Well, you’ll need three certification points for the skill and a copy of *Core Combat*. “We wanted to give the players who invest in the expansion a feeling like they are really getting their money’s worth,” says Georgeson. The only snag is one we cited when reviewing *Core Combat* the first time around: You need to pay extra money to be able to use this new gear. But you can still be on the receiving end of a BFR attack even if you don’t pay for the expansion. So be on the lookout for these iron giants this August.

NEWS FEED

Take the blue pill; quickly! Atari has plans to re-launch *Midway*, according to inside sources. Though still officially unannounced, two games are currently in development. Is Shiny involved as well? Nobody’s talking just yet...

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EverQuest II

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■ RHO OD

Just Say No to Gleam

Achaea addicts get their fix with a crippling virtual drug

Let those newbs have their *Evercrack*. According to the long-running, text-based MMO *Achaea* (www.achaea.com), "gleam" is the fix of choice for the truly hardcore addicts.

Developer Iron Realms Entertainment introduced the (digital) life-altering substance to players just a few months ago, convincing people to try it merely because it was free. "The citizens of Ashtan eventually drove [the dealers] from the city, but a rather dubious individual named Dr Kortoxian, in the desert village of ElJazira, has learned to manufacture the drug," Matt Mihaly, CEO and creative director, boasts. Thanks to the clever doctor, more than 40 players are now irrevocably "hooked" on the white powder that has been likened to cocaine.

Apparently, those few dozen fixed folks didn't read the fine print before snorting. "The effects of gleaming range from sped-up speech—being random removal of spaces between your words—with increasing frequency as you gleam harder; head and mouth tics, and



"All I know is nobody really wants to hang around a gleam addict."

hallucinations of people who aren't there entering your location, to improved dexterity," Mihaly says. "The dexterity boost is mild, however, and does not nearly compensate for the risk in using gleam. In my opinion."

That's an understatement, because habitual use of gleam makes a hangover seem like Christmas morning. "Someone withdrawing from gleam is a pathetic sight: throwing up; begging for gleam or money to buy gleam, which is not under the user's control, shivering, losing control of their muscles; collapsing to the floor; and so on." Translation: a cold, twitchy, puke-splattered end.

But such untimely demises are hardly a message to young impressionable keyboard jockeys about the dangers of such dirty substances. "We neither condone nor condemn drug use, as it's really none of our business what players are doing outside our world," Mihaly offers. "All I know is nobody really wants to hang around a gleam addict."

What's next? Virtual hookers and "pixellis"? ☐ Jon M. Gibson

Talking Heads

“I don’t know if I’m gonna be a star or not,” says actress Traci Dinwiddie, 26, about her sound recording. “Maybe you’ve seen her in TV shows such as *Malice in Wonderland* or in movies such as *Blade*—or perhaps you’ve seen her other (ahem) body of work. Whatever the case, Traci is now doing voiceovers. She’s the star of the forthcoming animated film *The Chosen One* and is playing the role of Dr. Alice McNeal for VJ Games’ recently released *Ground Control II: Operation Executive*. ☐ Brad Stoen

“I’m not being typecast,” says Dinwiddie, 26, about her sound recording. “I’m not being typecast. I would be the niche, they’d try to put me into, but it just never happened. That’s the reason I’m doing it, because I’m not trying to fit into any type of box.”

“I’m not typecast,” says Dinwiddie, 26, about her sound recording. “I’m not typecast. I’m not typecast. Then usually all you see is a still shot of whatever character looks like and maybe a brief description of their voice. That’s just sort of breaking down the role as an actress. Though the producers of *Ground Control II* were really specific about how they wanted them to be played, they really wanted someone who was very comical and sort of this character who has the medical knowledge but can’t act.”

“I’m getting to do it in a more natural way,” says Dinwiddie, 26, about her sound recording. “I don’t know what would happen if the other actors could see me. Would I be willing to be a goof? I have no idea. Because when you do voiceovers, when you have a feather will, a falsetto, a cartoon falsetto, like yourself. What’s your sound? What’s your groove?”

■ INTERPLAY-ED OUT

One Foot in the Grave

The once-mighty game publisher sees mighty tough times

A moment of silence, please. Interplay, longtime game publisher and industry pioneer, has fallen on ludicrously tough times. Its once-mighty Black Isle Studios (responsible for shepherding such classic RPGs as *Planescape: Torment*, *Baldur's Gate*, *Icewind Dale*, and the *Fallout* series) is abandoned. All that's left is a voice mail phone system that no one answers and an official website that has mysteriously been offline for weeks now.

Rumors began circulating in early June that the company's Irvine, CA, headquarters had closed following a mediocre earnings announcement in April. With a stack of back taxes and numerous lawsuits (including a claim by BioWare for \$156,000 in *Baldur's Gate* royalties) to deal with, things weren't looking too good for Interplay. Several days after these rumors emerged, *The Orange County Register* reported the studio's closure at the hands of California state officials. Complaints by unpaid employees prompted a hasty investigation that revealed, among other things a lack of worker's compensation insurance within the company.

But that's not all. Days after Interplay was forced to close its doors, business

resumed as usual after a quick reacquisition of worker's compensation. The very same day, Titus Interactive—Interplay's France-based parent company and majority shareholder—declared bankruptcy. Titus' shares have been frozen, pending further investigation of its financial situation.

According to the *Register*, Interplay CFO Herve Caen claims that Titus' predicament does not impact Interplay, and he continues to maintain an optimistic outlook about his company's future. However, Interplay still has plenty of financial hurdles to overcome, which could be compounded even further due to a currently ongoing audit.

What does the future hold for Interplay? No one knows

I What does the future hold for Interplay? No one knows for certain at this point.

Interplay

RIP

?

for certain at this point, but it definitely looks bleak. "It's really inconceivable that they could take one of the most prolific and successful game developers and just run it right into the ground," said one reader on our forums. "Well, if Apple rebounded," remarked another reader "anyone can." ■ Ryan Scott

Reality Check

Reality Check compares the ratings of the major gaming press with GameRankings.com, which averages all published reviews.

Game	CGW	CGN	GameSpot	IGN	GameSpy	MacGuru	GameRankings.com
Beyond Divinity	C	C	B	B+	B+	B+	B+
City of Heroes	A	A	B+	B+	B+	B+	A-
Hitman: Contracts	C	C	B	B+	D	B+	B
Lineage II	D	C-	C	—	C	C+	B-
Warlords: Battlecry II	B	B+	B+	B+	C	B	B+

NEWS FEED MMO talk: Trade in your old retail box of an MMO you didn't like and get 30 free days playing *Jumpgate* at www.jsoff.com. 431 Studios is being sued over *Warlords*? Copy/Own called that "we bailed in May" (CGW #238, p. 22).

100 BUCKS

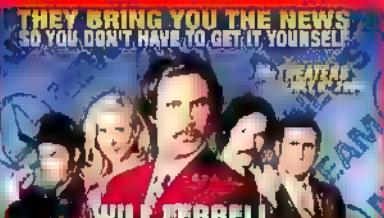
It's burning a hole in your pocket. Go spend it



MOVIE Beastie Boys' 'Boroughs'

\$13, WWW.THEBEASTIEBOYS.COM

With every release, the beasties rewrite how the game is played. Now, six years since *Hello Nasty* blew up, we're ready to ch-ch-check this new disc out. While it doesn't have all the funky collaborations of a *Paul's Boutique* (but really, nothing else does), *Boroughs* is a mature throw-back to the likes of *License to Ill*.



MOVIE Anchorman (\$10 TICKET)

WWWANCHORMANTHEMOVIE.COM Who better to play a 1970s TV anchorman than Will Ferrell? Just about everything this guy does is freakishly funny, and we can't wait to see him in action here.

MOVIE Supersize Me

\$10 TICKET,

WWW.SUPER-SIZEME.COM

One man, one goal—eat nothing but McDonald's meals for an entire month. And then another.

He wants to get the meal supersized, he has to. Doesn't sound too bad, does it? This documentary is a painfully funny look at someone who's eaten one Big Mac too many.

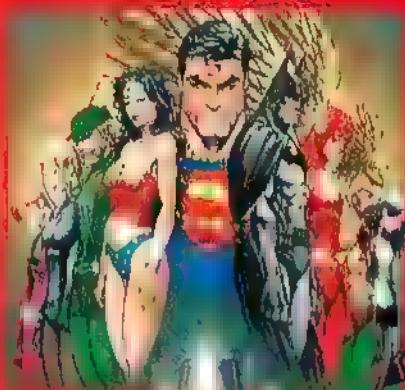
BOOK The Stepford Wives

\$7, WWW.HARPERCOLLINS.COM

The Frank Oz remake of this classic 1975 movie is actually a

pretty good analogy for the book: Take something good and pure and corrupt it by removing any substance and starting it up. Trust us—stick with the original story of a male-driven secret society in blue-blooded

Connecticut. Buy the book.



DC's competitors at Marvel have also released *Identity Disk*. Out there is a list of every superpowered person, and a comic version of Keyser Soze wants it for himself. Both are interesting reads that will, no doubt, come out as graphic novels.

BOOK Dead Like Me – Season One box set

\$19.99, WWW.Deadlikeme.com

Life's a bitch and then you die. Then you become an otherworldly collection agent. Such is the afterlife for poor George. He's got to collect the souls of those who kick the bucket and make sure they get to their final destination. This black comedy is a hidden gem on Showtime and definitely worth watching.



MOVIE Loretta Lynn, Van Lear Rose

\$11, WWW.AMAZON.COM

Johnny Cash came on strong with his last few albums. Other country legends were sure to follow. This twangy CD shows that southern belle Loretta Lynn still has what it takes. The amazing part is how the White Stripes' Jack White checked his ego at the door to produce this awesome collaborative effort.

Pocket Change: \$1.00



■ PARENTAL CONTROL

The Ratings Game

The one time publishers don't want the high score

Senator Joe Lieberman must be proud. The Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) was formed 10 years ago after a spate of debates over games such as *Mortal Kombat* and *Night Trap*. But have you ever wondered who these people are? Who says that one game gets a T instead of an M rating? We had the chance to speak with Patricia Vance, president of the ESRB, and got the inside scoop.

"First, there's a lengthy submission form that publishers have to fill out," says Vance. "This has to be accompanied by a video on which it's critical that they submit the most extreme content. The submission form sets up the game for the raters and describes the content of both the game and any movie sequences.

"There's always a minimum of three raters per product, and they all look at the documentation and then view the video scene by scene. We look for a consensus of opinion from them, and we ask people to assign what they think the rating should be. Our criteria for raters are that we want them to be over 21 and have some experience with kids. It's not important whether they are gamers or not..."

Why do they watch the video and not play the games? With an interactive medium, isn't it important for the raters to, well, you know... interact?

"With games mostly having upward of 50 hours of gameplay these days, it's just not practical," Vance concedes. "The raters are looking at content, and this isn't a qualitative judgment call. They're looking at the content provided by the publishers and assigning labels to that content."

But doesn't that put all the control in the hands of the publisher?

"Yes, but when a product is submitted, they are obligated to a set of principles and guidelines along with a code of conduct. These include everything from where the product descriptors should be placed on the packaging to where an M-rated game can be advertised. Publishers are all subject to a set of practices that are fully enforced by the ESRB. If a publisher violates the code of conduct, then we have a number of options open to us. There are three basic classes of violation, and those are anything from marking a product wrong to inappropriately targeting an M-rated product by, say, putting an ad in an inappropriate place."

What if a publisher chooses not to disclose some content? Wouldn't it be easy to slip something through?

"As well as all the material that we ask for early on, we also get copies of final code after a product has shipped, which our in-house rating department will play. At this point, if something is spotted and needs to be changed, there are a number of courses of action open to the publisher. They can take corrective action with the product, which is potentially very expensive, or they can re-sticker the box with an adjusted rating. If mistakes are made, they tend to not be intentional. It just doesn't happen often because of the ramifications. We also have the option to just not rate something. Retail wants games to be rated, so we have that as a form of enforcement. For most places, no rating means the game won't be stocked."

■ John Davison

John Davison, editorial director of the Ziff Davis Game Group, originally wrote this story for the August 2004 issue of Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine.

MOSTLY FOR EVERYONE

57%

of all games rated in 2003 received an E rating.

32%

of all games rated in 2003 received a T rating.

10%

of all games rated in 2003 received an M rating.

1%

of all games rated in 2003 received an EC rating.

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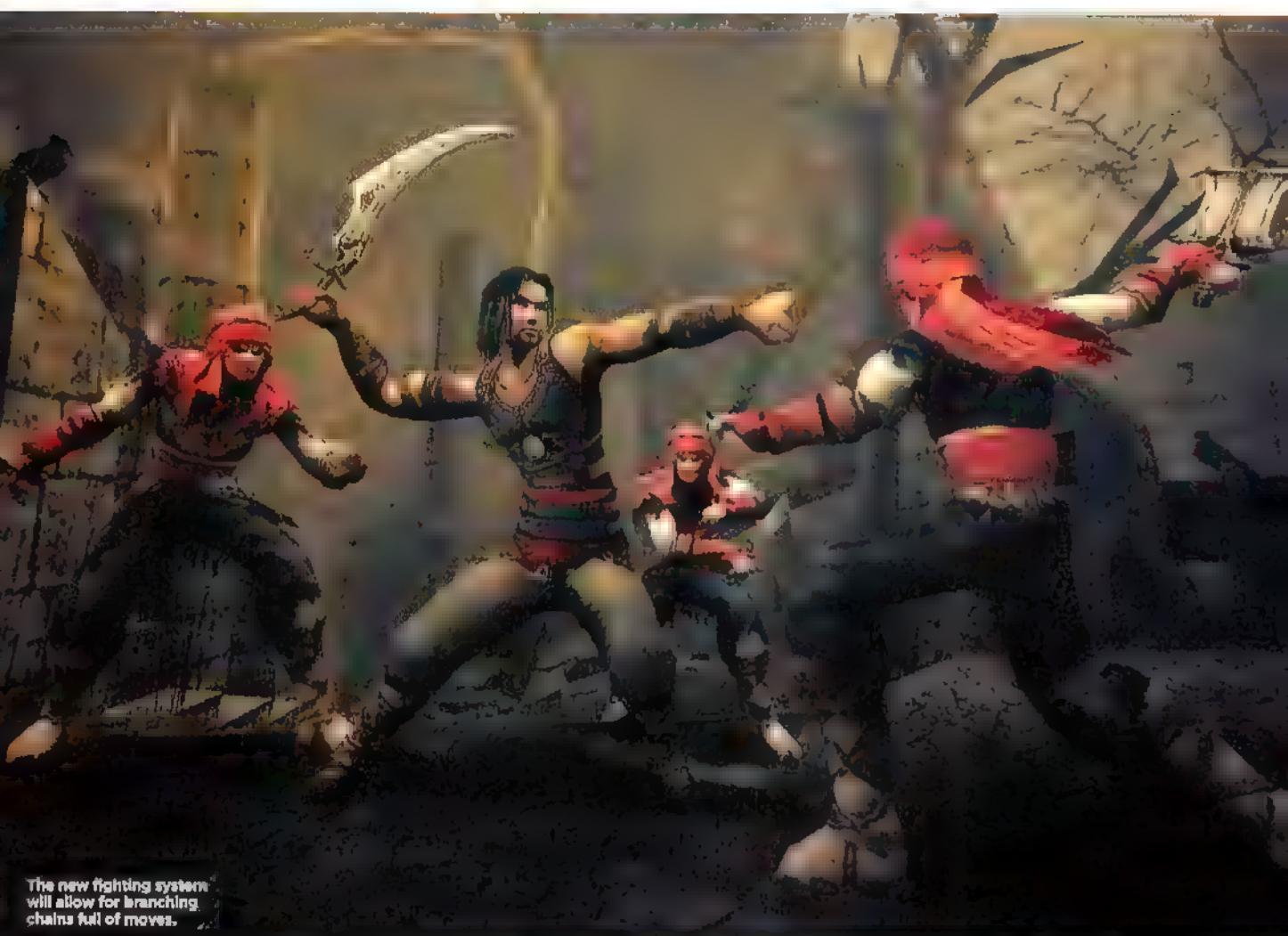
Survey closes August 23, 2004

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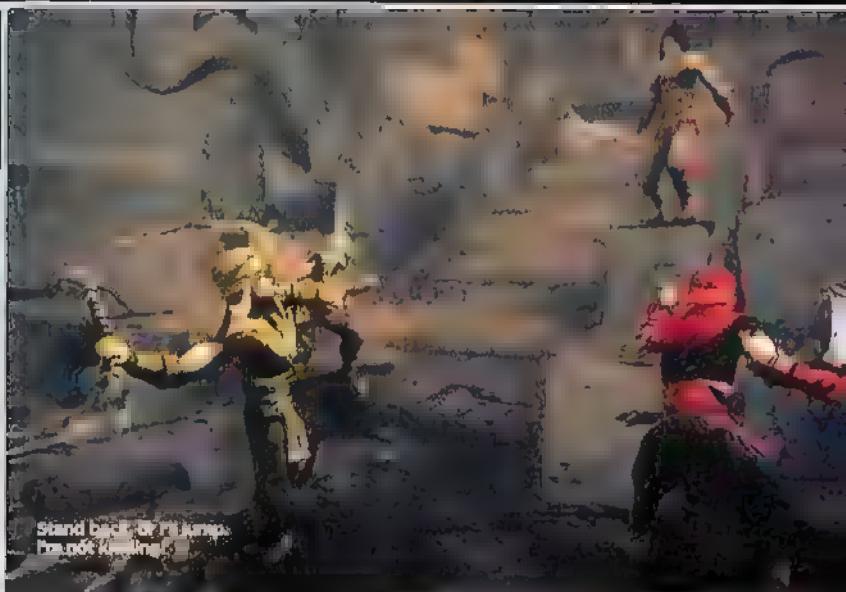
Previews



The new fighting system will allow for branching chains full of moves.



Finish off an enemy or help off its back to another foe.



Stand back for a finish or back-killing.

The spiritual sequel to the award-winning *The Longest Journey*, starring new girl Zoe

Combine the depth of the first *Kohan's* strategy with a fresh new 3D engine

Make a happy home for the many creatures you can love and hug and call George

Ubisoft

Ubisoft Montreal

Action

November 2004

Prince of Persia 2

Roll out the magic carpet

Time changes all things—even games. *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* was CGW's 2003 action game of the year, but already the sequel is nearly upon us, and much has changed, indeed, since then.

Set about six years after the original's events, *Prince of Persia 2* (working title) follows the adventures of the same Prince, but our hero is greatly humbled. His best friend has been killed before his very eyes, and the Prince's cockiness and hubris are directly responsible. Tortured by this the Prince changes and emerges a darker character.

When the Prince first stole the mystical Sands of Time dagger, he was fated to die. Because he managed to cheat death, fate has intervened and materialized as an omnipotent creature called Dahaka. To save himself, the Prince must travel back in time to the island where the Sands of Time dagger was forged and prevent the dagger from being made in the first place.

A Hollywood screenwriting team is behind this new story, and Danny Ruiz, the game's brand manager, promises, "If the original game's plot was like a mini roller coaster, then the twists and turns of this sequel will be like a Six Flags supercoaster, with more second-guessing and unexpected twists."

The hook

Time manipulation again plays a significant role in gameplay. Thus far, there are three confirmed time maneuvers—slow, speed, and rewind—though more are being developed and tested to ensure they'll fit well into the overall gameplay.

One complaint with the original game was a fighting system that became formulaic as the game progressed. The "Cirque du Soleil" flair of the original's battles is replaced in the sequel with more vicious fighting and a more complex combat system, including numerous combos and branching techniques. Plus, watch for spewing blood and rolling heads! OK, that's actually dependent on discussions with the ESRB.

The Prince can now carry two weapons and use them in tandem (e.g., a scissor-like snip of a neck), or he can use one as a projectile and keep swinging away with the other. Also look for a variety of weapons, from hammers to daggers, each with different strengths.

The flair of the original's battles is replaced with vicious fighting and a complex combo system.

A more strategic combat system involves using the environment to your advantage. To wit: Two enemies stand next to a pole in the inner hull of a ship. The Prince runs toward them, grabs the pole, and spins around it in a half circle like a blender blade, cleanly leaving the two enemies sans heads.

The snare

The Sands of Time is an amazing game reviewed and praised highly across the board, but the almighty dollar spoke differently—the game sold below expectations. Many of the planned changes in the sequel look to open up sales to a wider audience, but the changes don't feel forced. It seems like a natural progression for the story and the character.

Players griped that in the original, puzzle and battle areas were distinctively separate. That line will be blurred in the sequel. One early example: An enemy sprints by at lightning speed, and in order to fight him, you must slow time.

Jordan Mechner, creator of the original *Prince of Persia*, is not involved with this sequel. Instead, he's cowriting the screenplay for the upcoming *Prince of Persia*.

movie, which is being done through Disney and Bruckheimer (*Pirates of the Caribbean, King Arthur*).

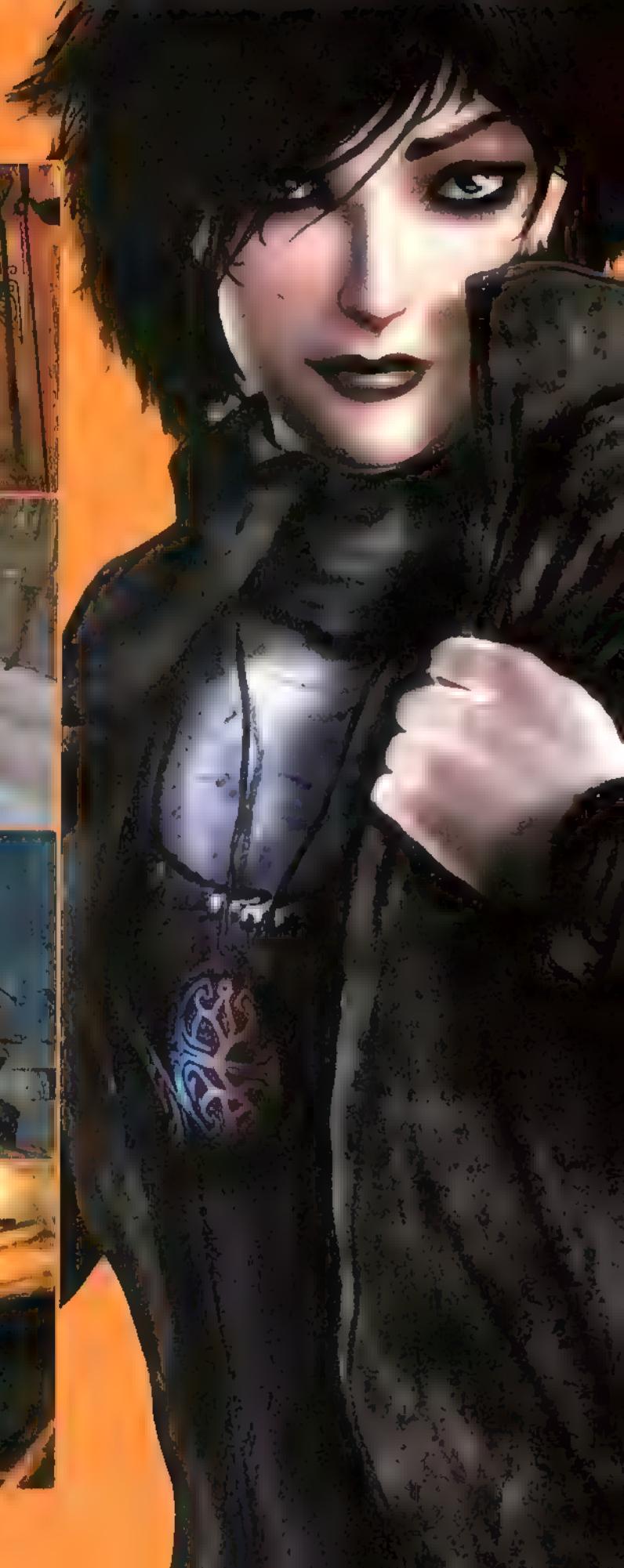
A quick, final note: Farah, the love interest from the first game, will make no appearances, but we're told that "incentives for replay" will. What does that mean? Details haven't yet been revealed, but we're hoping for multiple pathways and endings, not just trite costume changes. **Johnny Liu**

TOP 10 REASONS ME



TOP 10 REASONS ME

Certain scenarios allow you to use the environment in combat.



PUBLISHER **Funcom** DEVELOPER **Funcom** GENRE **Action-Adventure** RELEASE DATE **2005**

Dreamfall

The longer *Longest Journey*

SHORTLY AFTER his new creation will kill the markings on his schoolboy crush, the new lady in his life is Zoo Castillo, one of three principle characters in *Dreamfall*, the sequel to *The Longest Journey*—although “sequel” isn’t quite the right word. Unlike the original point-and-click graphic-adventure game, *Dreamfall* will be much more action-oriented with a third-person view and full 3D environments that utilize analog control.

The book

**This is a Grubster.
Not exactly a
friendly looking
bug.**



Empirical research has demonstrated that primary prevention is the best way to combat obesity.

The square

Flashback

THE LONGEST JOURNEY

If you haven't checked out the original title, you should—it's one of the best traditional adventure games of the past few years. Despite being almost 4 years old, it manages to hold up really well, with stunning art and an engrossing story. If you can handle the somewhat-dated conventions of the point-and-click genre—such as pixel hunting for clues—give this game a try.

The Word **TRIUMPHANT**

Kohan II: Kings of War

Hail to the kings, baby

Kohan: *Immortal Sovereigns*, CGW's Strategy Game of the Year 2001, wasn't much of a looker, but it had sharp strategy and story to help it stand out. *Kohan II: Kings of War* makes the series over with new 3D graphics while still maintaining all the unique gameplay strengths that grounded the original game. We were able to get our hands on a late build of the game for an expanded second-look preview.

The hook

The original *Kohan: Immortal Sovereigns* was not the easiest game to play right out of the box. *Kohan II* aims for a much more intuitive and easily learned gameplay approach—"streamlining" is the operative word here. The game's interface and economic system will be easier for beginners to grasp, making for a markedly less-intimidating learning curve.

As with many real-time-strategy



Hero characters grant your company more power.

Instead of churning out individual units, you'll draft entire combat companies. Less micromanagement, more strategy.

games, *Kohan II*'s gameplay focuses on base building and resource gathering. Settlement camps are constructed on predetermined areas of the map. After assembling your settlement's central base, additional elements such as steel mills and stone quarries can be built into various locations throughout the camp. Walls of different strength can also be erected to provide protection for your constantly growing base.

Instead of wrestling with the typical

tedium that comes with mining for resources, you harvest raw materials automatically from the buildings inside your base. This eliminates the need for worker drones and the meticulous micromanagement that comes with them, which allows you to focus more energy on improving your base, building an effective army, and putting the hurt on opposing camps.

Units also work differently from what you might be used to in other RTS games. Instead of churning out individual units, you'll draft entire combat companies. There are several predefined companies to choose from, each with its own advantages and disadvantages, and if you really want to take charge of things, you can create custom-tailored companies of your own. These companies also encourage the use of more tactical-combat strategies—if even a lone soldier manages to escape a losing battle and make it back to safety, a decimated group can be regenerated.



A full-on attack against a stone fortress settlement.

The snare

Kohan II isn't the most dazzling game on the horizon—even with an upgraded 3D graphics engine, it seems to be falling a bit behind the curve. Its character models are small, more iconic representations of combat units; you certainly won't be seeing the massive conquering armies or the animation quality of games such as *Rome: Total War* and *Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War*.

Another more shallow stumbling block, besides a crowded market, is that *Kohan* isn't exactly a household name—but then again, neither was *Shogun: Total War*. Only time will tell if *Kohan II: Kings of War* can make the ascension to RTS royalty. JL



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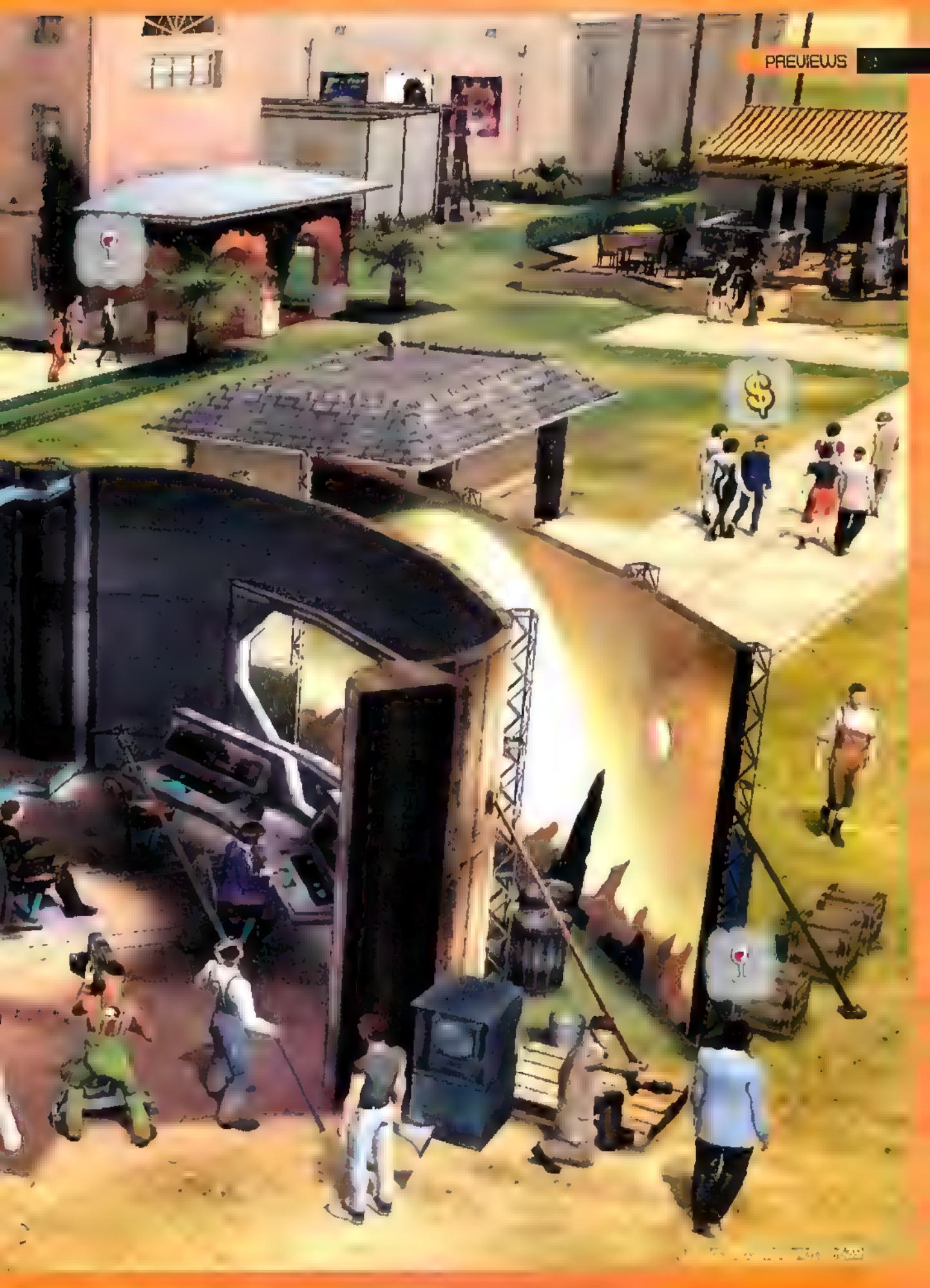
Mild Violence

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The movies

 In *The Movies*, the upcoming simulation from Lionhead Studios, you take control of a humble film studio and grow it into a moneymaking empire big enough to make Spielberg himself jealous. All the posh pleasures of the Hollywood lifestyle are your studio's to command: a multi-billion-dollar sci-fi summer blockbuster, paparazzi, glamour queens—you name it. And when you're not busy wheeling, dealing, and managing your studio, you can film and edit short sequences to share with friends across the Internet. You can even use photos from your cell-phone cameras in the game, which gives us a feeling we'll be seeing a slew of *Scary Movie* films from a certain Will O'Neal.





PREVIEWS

INGAME Screenshot KONTROLLIERT 1. 4. März 1944

WWII REAL-TIME
STRATEGY



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PANZERS
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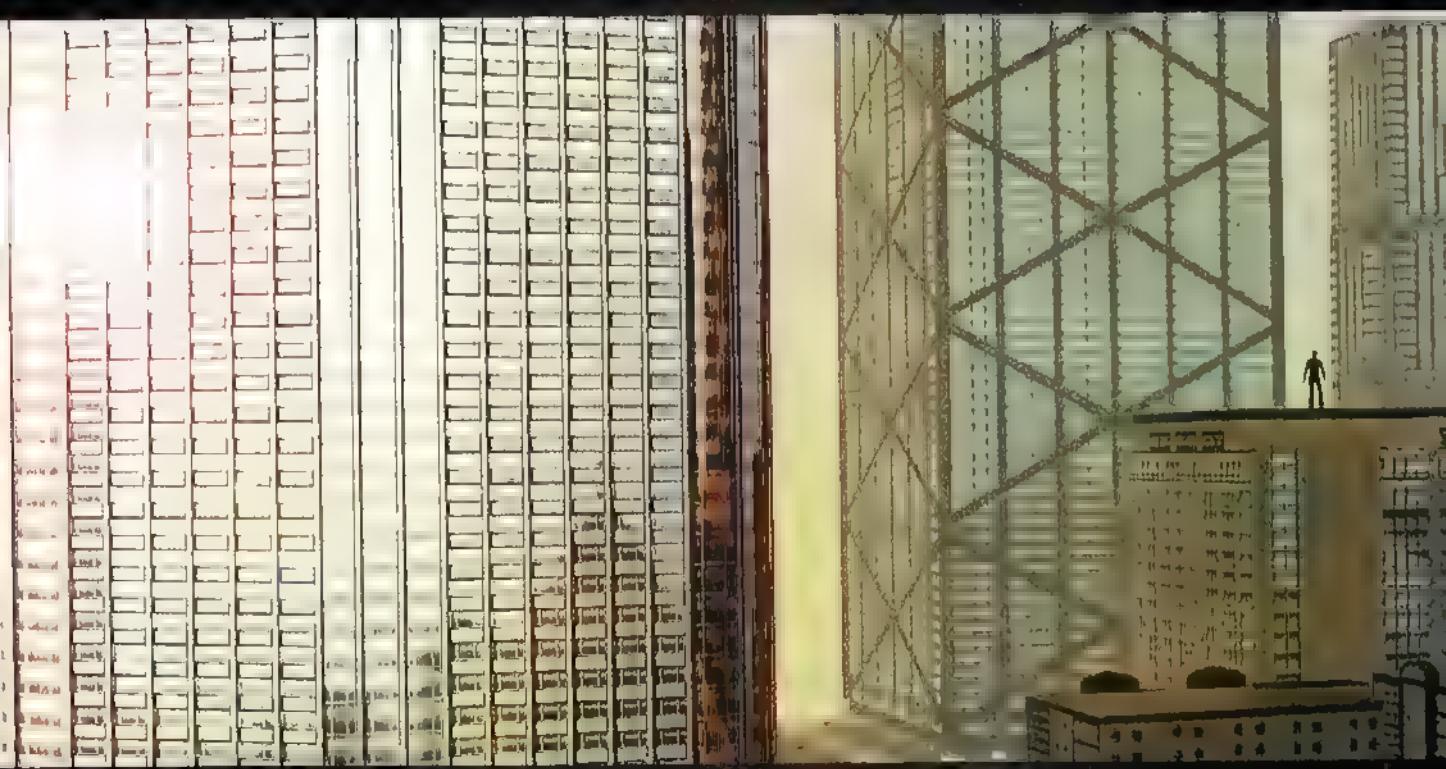
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PUBLISHER: Ubisoft DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal GENRE: Adventure RELEASE DATE: 2005

Myst IV: Revelation

A mystical new adventure

The original *Myst* was an engaging game quite matched. *Myst IV: Revelation* is the latest attempt to reinvigorate the franchise by harkening back to the original *Myst* story of Sirius and Achenar. This time around, the two brothers are searching for their missing baby sister Veisha, and it's up to you to help them find her.

The hook

Myst IV: Revelation is a first-person adventure game mode of exploration, but the game's vivid animation and sound help immerse the player in the action. Furthermore, the point-and-click controls have been refined. Boosting the game's sound effects, Ubisoft believes adding sound effects to the controls will add more tactility to the controls. *Myst IV: Revelation* will also feature a much improved hint system that guides you through the game's more difficult challenges.



The snare

Myst IV: Revelation promises to go back to the roots of the original *Myst* franchise. Set in the same world as the original *Myst*, *Revelation* is a continuation of the

by Johnny Liu

The World: **MYSTIFYING**

Myst IV: Revelation vs. Dark Fall: Lights Out

A QUICK COMPARISON

	Myst IV: Revelation	Dark Fall: Lights Out
You are...	Yourself	Parker, a cartographer
The time	Back to the worlds of <i>Myst</i>	Same place, three different time periods
Controls	Panoramic screens with objects and puzzles	Screens with objects and puzzles
Features	New more animated, immersive, and tactile	Ghost elements, spooky story with subplots
Looks...	Quite artistic	Like CG

The snare

First-person graphic adventures haven't been getting much attention lately, though The Adventure Company is hoping to change that with *Lights Out*. Of course, if the game suffers from problems (i.e., pixel hunting) that have plagued the genre in the past, it may not be able to do that. Still, the same "been there, done that" feeling

The World: **SPOOKY**

Dark Fall: Lights Out

Break out the night-light

The original *Dark Fall: Lights Out* does not have remote. By the same co-creator as the *Myst* franchise, it is among the many games inspired by the original *Myst*. That said, *Dark Fall: Lights Out* is clever in its own right and may well end up to be a good sequel in line with the original.

The game centers on a character named Parker, a professional mapmaker who has been hired to chart the harbor town of Trewarthan. At the edge of this town lies the mysterious lighthouse of Fetch Rock. Parker must delve into the dark history surrounding the lighthouse as he works to save a group

of lost souls.

The hook

Lights Out will have more than 50 pre-rendered locations to explore. You will have you traveling among multiple time periods, as time twisting and flashbacks play crucial roles in the story line.

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SEGA



Visit www.esrb.org
for updated rating
information.

PUBLISHER Microsoft Game Studios DEV: GPG GENRE Action RELEASE DATE Spring 2005

Dungeon Siege II

Back to the dungeon

A generation has passed since the events of the original *Dungeon Siege*. The land of Ebh was freed from evil, and we were free to leave our PCs for a few minutes. Now, in *Dungeon Siege II*, a new prophecy is coming to pass, with an incarnation of evil hailing back to the First Age of Man.

The First Age ended with a battle so epic that the very earth was torn asunder. Legions of humans were consumed, and magic was unleashed unto the world. A thousand years later, magic flows freely to anyone willing to take hold of its power—including the sinister forces of apocalyptic doom.

The hook

This time around, the folks at Gas Powered Games swear that the story is a more tightly integrated part of *Dungeon Siege II*. There's a steadily unfolding narrative and more well-rounded characters, who now converse and disagree with one another.

Characters are now more customizable. As in the original *Dungeon Siege*, you choose from one of four races (humans, elves, dryads, and half-giants). However, *Dungeon Siege II* sports a new branching skill system that varies the abilities of each of the four different classes: fighter, ranger, earth mage, and combat mage. It may have been liberally borrowed from what has already been done in *Diablo II*, but why mess with a good thing?

You control only six characters here (as opposed to the original game's eight), but now you have a greater degree of control over each one, eliminating the "sit back and watch" issues that plagued the original.

You can also raise various pets. Instead of relying on the previous game's simple pack mode, by feeding your pets various items, you can raise formidable combat



One pet starts out as a cute, not-so-cuddly fire elemental, but by game's end, it evolves into a flaming behemoth.



allies, with the type of items determining how your pets mature. Have too many useless daggers and weak shields? Pet food.

One pet starts out as a cute, not-so-cuddly fire elemental, but by game's end, it evolves into a flaming behemoth.

Enemies are much more alive and cunning this time around, too. We witnessed a band of implike enemies flee from a powerful party in battle, only to turn the tables on them by leading them into a trap-filled clearing. Clearly, *Dungeon Siege II*'s foes aren't your garden-variety D&D goblins.

Dungeon Siege, the movie?



The snare

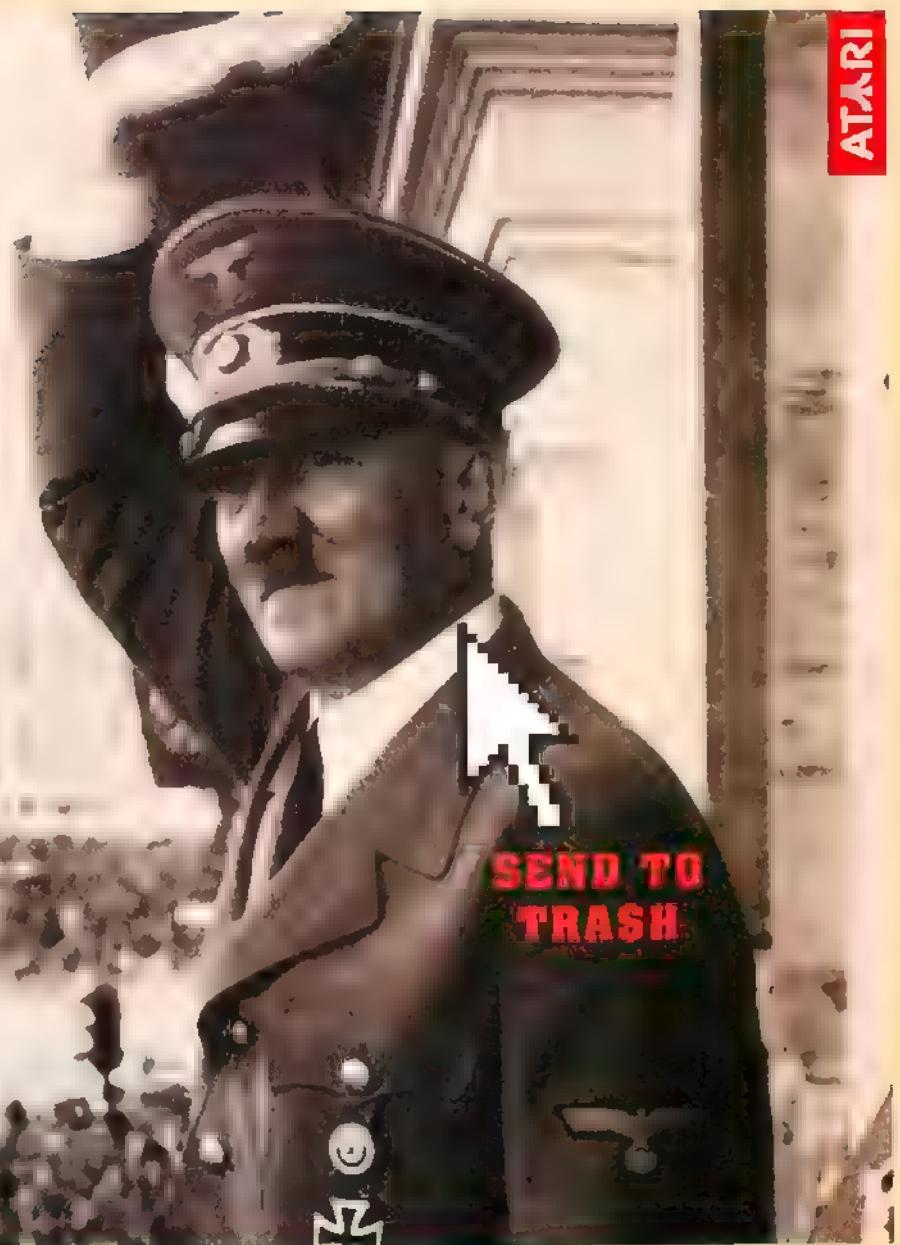
While there seem to be vast improvements throughout the gameplay, what we've seen so far hasn't been a huge visual revolution. Perhaps the reason is that *Dungeon Siege II* is built upon an updated version of the original's 2-year-old engine. Nonetheless, it is still a bit early to pass judgment, given the game's newly appointed spring 2005 release. Let's hope that the time will be used to add a bit more polish—after all, we don't want a repeat of *Legends of Aranna*. **JL**

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The hook

The square

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PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Advent Rising	Blue Byte	September 2004
Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion	id Software	September 2004
Armies of Exigo	Big Picture	October 2004
Atatni Evolution	Big Adventure	September 2004
Auto Assault	Blue Byte	September 2004
The Bard's Tale	Blue Byte	September 2004
Battlefield 2	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Black & White II	Electronic Arts	September 2004
BloodRayne 2	Magnus Games	September 2004
Brothers in Arms	Ubisoft	September 2004
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Dark Horse Software	September 2004
Call of Duty: United Offensive	Activision	September 2004
City of Villains	Camouflaj	September 2004
Civilization IV	Activision	September 2004
Codename: Panzers	CDV Software	September 2004
DRIV3R	Atari	September 2004
Doom 3	id Software	September 2004
Dungeon Siege II	Obsidian	September 2004
Empire Earth 2	Aspyr Media	September 2004
EverQuest II	AOL	September 2004
Evil Genius	Activision	September 2004
FEAR	Ubisoft	September 2004
Final Fantasy XI: Chains of Promathia	Pearl	September 2004
Freedom Force vs. The Third Reich	Ubisoft	September 2004
Full Spectrum Warrior	Ubisoft	September 2004
Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	September 2004
Guild Wars	Obsidian	September 2004
Half-Life 2	Vivendi Universal	September 2004
The Incredibles	EA	September 2004
Kohan II: Kings of War	Camouflaj	September 2004
Loisirs Sali Larry: Magin City Loude	Ubisoft	September 2004
LOTR: The Battle for Middle-earth	EA	September 2004
Madden NFL 2005	EA	September 2004
The Matrix Online	Ubisoft	September 2004
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Men of Valor	Ubisoft	September 2004
Middle-Earth Online	Camouflaj	September 2004
The Movies	EA	September 2004

Now Update

REVIEWER: Microsoft Game Studios FE RELEASE DATE: Fall 2004

Zoo Tycoon 2

Happy monkeys or sad pandas?

True story: One time at a zoo, a trainer told his elephant to stand up. Instead of doing as it was told, the elephant took an enormous dump. What does this have to do with *Zoo Tycoon 2*? Besides taking place in a zoo and featuring an elephant, absolutely nothing. It could be said that a whole mess of new features has been dumped into this sequel, but these features are more likely to thrill *Zoo Tycoon* fans than to stink up the place.

The hook

Zoo Tycoon 2 features a single-player campaign as well as an open sandbox mode; both are charged with new elements and highlighted by an attractive 3D game engine. Much depth is brought to the series thanks to a slew of options, including the first-person zoo guest mode, which allows you to drop down from the standard overhead view to freely walk around and examine various animal exhibits. There's also a zookeeper mode for grooming your creatures and a zoo photographer mode that allows you to take pictures of some 30 different animals and share them online.

You create your zoo's exhibits with the habitat editor and biome brush, which are used to terraform the landscape with all the ease of using a paintbrush. By building proper habitats that suit the different beasts, unique animal animations are unlocked. Playful, moving creatures make zoo patrons happy—and willing to spend more money.

Like in most tycoon-style games, money is the key to building your empire, though it certainly isn't the only factor to keep track of. For example, you might choose to send an animal back into the wild in order to score praise from conservation groups—but park attendance might drop if you turn a crowd favorite loose.



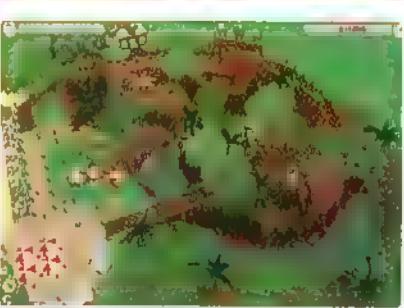
These and other details lend more reality to the *Zoo Tycoon* experience.

The snare

The new features add greatly to the game's depth, but fuzzy animals don't quite speak to the hardcore 133t of the gaming community. While a game definitely shouldn't be dismissed because it has cuddly critters, it's fairly safe to

say that *Zoo Tycoon 2* will be more exciting for young tykes and tycoon fanatics than it will be for the *UT2004* crowd.  **Johnny Liu**

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PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
Myst IV: Revelation	UbiSoft	Q3 2004
NASCAR 2005: Chase for the Cup	Electronic Arts	February 2005
NHL 2005	Electronic Arts	Q3 2004
Operation Flashpoint 2	Bohemia Interactive	Q3 2004
Pacific Fighters	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Pariah	GreenHart Studios	Q4 2004
Playboy: The Mansion	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Postal 2: Apocalypse Weekend	Refractive	Q4 2004
Prince of Persia 2 (working title)	Ubisoft	October 2004
Psychotoxic	GLY Software	2004
Quake IV	id	2005
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	Ubisoft	November 2004
Rome: Total War	Paradox	September 2004
The Saga of Byzantium	Novogames	September 2004
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Alien	November 2004
Shanty Hill 4: The Room	Konami	Q3 2004
Silent Hunter III	Ubisoft	September 2004
Silent Storm: Sentinels	Electronic Arts	2004
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Spider Cell 3	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
STALKER: Shadow of Chernobyl	UBS	September 2004
Star Wars Battlefront	Ubisoft	Q4 2004
Star Wars Galaxies: Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	October 2004
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic—The Sith Lords	LucasArts	Q4 2004
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	October 2004
Supremacy: Four Paths to Power	Strategy First	2004
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategy First	2004
SWAT 4	Midway	September 2004
Tabula Rasa	NCsoft	September 2004
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	October 2004
Tribes: Vengeance	MindArk/Universal	Q4 2004
Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts	October 2004
Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines	Activision	November 2004
Vanguard: Saga of Heroes	Ubisoft	2004
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	THQ	September 2004
Wartime Command: Battle for Europe 1939-1945	Ubisoft	October 2004
World of Warcraft	Blizzard	September 2004
Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim II	Konami	Q4 2004
Zoo Tycoon 2	Microsoft	Q3 2004

New **Update**

PUBLISHER: Legacy Interactive DEVELOPER: Legacy Interactive GENRE: Simulation RELEASE DATE: Fall 2004

ER

Hippocratic oath? Bah! Who needs it?

When you think *ER*, you think serious doctor drama. The last thing you'd expect is Noah Wyle poisoning other doctors or faith-healing patients. Thankfully, now you can play the *ER* you've always wanted to watch, with *ER* the PC game.

The hook

Fans of *The Sims* might take a liking to this quirkiest take on medicine. You begin as an intern, building your skills in various branches of medicine. With a wave of your hands, little sparkles of magic rise up from the patients. That means you are using medicine—or, we assume, faith healing—to cure patients. You can also slip the other doctors laxatives to get a leg up on your competition.

The snare

Legacy Interactive has been making television-to-PC game translations for a while now, specifically with its *Law &*



Order series. *ER*'s development is heading in a completely different, less serious direction. If the game were an actual simulation based on the show, there could be more depth and education—or maybe a helicopter rotor chopping off someone's arm—but then it wouldn't be nearly as funny.

—Johnny Liu

PRESCRIPTIVE

PUBLISHER: Sonalysts Combat Simulations DEVELOPER: Sonalysts Combat Simulations GENRE: Naval Simulation RELEASE DATE: August 2004

Dangerous Waters

Torpedo in the water

Fans of naval simulations have long been set adrift by a lack of topical games—until now. *Dangerous Waters* takes military simulation to both sea and air with such a level of realism that publisher Sonalysts Combat Simulations had to get Department of Defense clearance just to release it.

The hook

While former Sonalysts titles centered on submarines, *Dangerous Waters* aims to fill the seas with playable warships, aircraft, and subs, including Perry-class frigates, Seahawk ASW helicopters, and P3 Orion reconnaissance planes. The game will utilize several levels of scalable realism, allowing it to be played as either a *Harpoon* style war game or a full-on naval simulation. *Dangerous Waters* multiplayer battles have a new twist as well: Multiple players can man different stations of the same craft, making for some



interesting team-based tactics.

The snare

It isn't the prettiest boat on the sea, but *Dangerous Waters* is still poised to be one of the most complete naval simulations to date. —Neal Stevens

NAUTICAL

DIGITAL UNDERGROUND

FROM Monte Cristo Multimedia AVAILABILITY Q4 2004

7 Sins

Word on the street: Vice City? Try Apple City instead. Greed, envy, lust, and other indulgences hold sway over a fictional metropolis in an esoteric life simulation that casts players as backstabbing social climbers. As one of these backstabbers you will pursue fame and fortune across seven chapters, with a grand total of 60 missions. By tempting, targeting, or titillating acquaintances, players indulge themselves and coerce NPCs into providing needed information—or in some cases, nookie. A unique and seductive gaming experience.

Sounds kinda beat: *Singles* wasn't that arousing. *The Guy Game* didn't rub audiences the right way. Why would more smarm hit the spot? Furthermore, French outfit Monte Cristo is known primarily for budgetware (*Emergency Fire Response*) and non-descript strategic offerings (*Platoon*), not this type of title. While it is a significant departure from the norm, this program could be an interesting experiment. Hedonism hasn't played well with the public so far, but it's always in fashion...



FROM Cenega AVAILABILITY Q4 2004

Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars

Word on the street: Go ahead. Call these creatures cuddly...and watch how many bullet wounds it gets you. Set atop curvaceous 3D landscapes, this humorous—and heavily armed—arcade game is an enjoyable enigma. Basically *Worms* meets *Wild Kingdom*, *Creature Conflict* offers both action-packed solo campaigns and myriad multi-player scenarios. Watch as species-based teams take turns exterminating one another with 30 zany weapons. Support for up to four participants and a terrain generator ensure the action will be—ahem—fur-ocious.

Sounds kinda beat: Unlike Team 17, whose once-popular *Worms* is already on the decline, developer Mithis is starting from scratch with its newest tactically minded title. Not a good sign, especially when you consider the market for shoot-em-up spoofs isn't that huge to begin with. Assuming a best-case scenario, an enterprising publisher could foster a cult following for the package, which does show promise.



FROM 1C Company AVAILABILITY Q4 2004

Ascension to the Throne

Word on the street: Proving that the turn-based-strategy well hasn't completely run dry, this unsung hero gets medieval on the genre. Eden has been taken over by a wicked wizard. As the last scion and rightful ruler of the Icar family, you gather an army to seek out your revenge. Commanding up to 22 squads of 16 men, couch-potato crusaders traverse an attractive, open-ended world, engaging in a smidgen of roleplaying as they go. A spellbinding visual presentation makes it worth watching.

Sounds kinda beat: As the "Microsoft of Russia," 1C churns out more products in a month than many publishers do in a year. Accordingly not every game is a winner. Ukrainian development house DVS, the outfit behind the adventure, doesn't have any domestically released offerings under its belt, either *Sleeper* hit or narcolepsy-inducing retread...the chips could fall anywhere. Still, any fantasy romp that follows in *Heroes of Might and Magic*'s footsteps is aces in our book.



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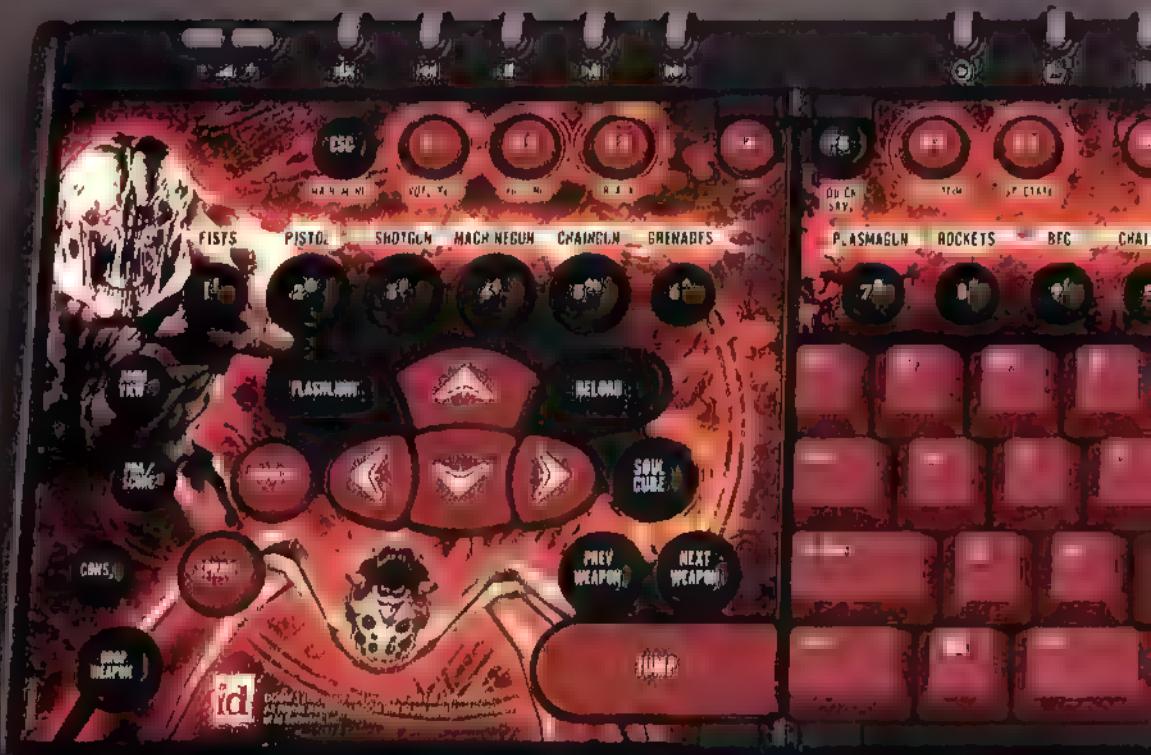
RANK: Major

NAME: Layhem

CAUSE OF DEATH:

Moron behind the keyboard activated his flashlight instead of his rocket launcher in the middle of a firefight.

WITHOUT A ZBOARD



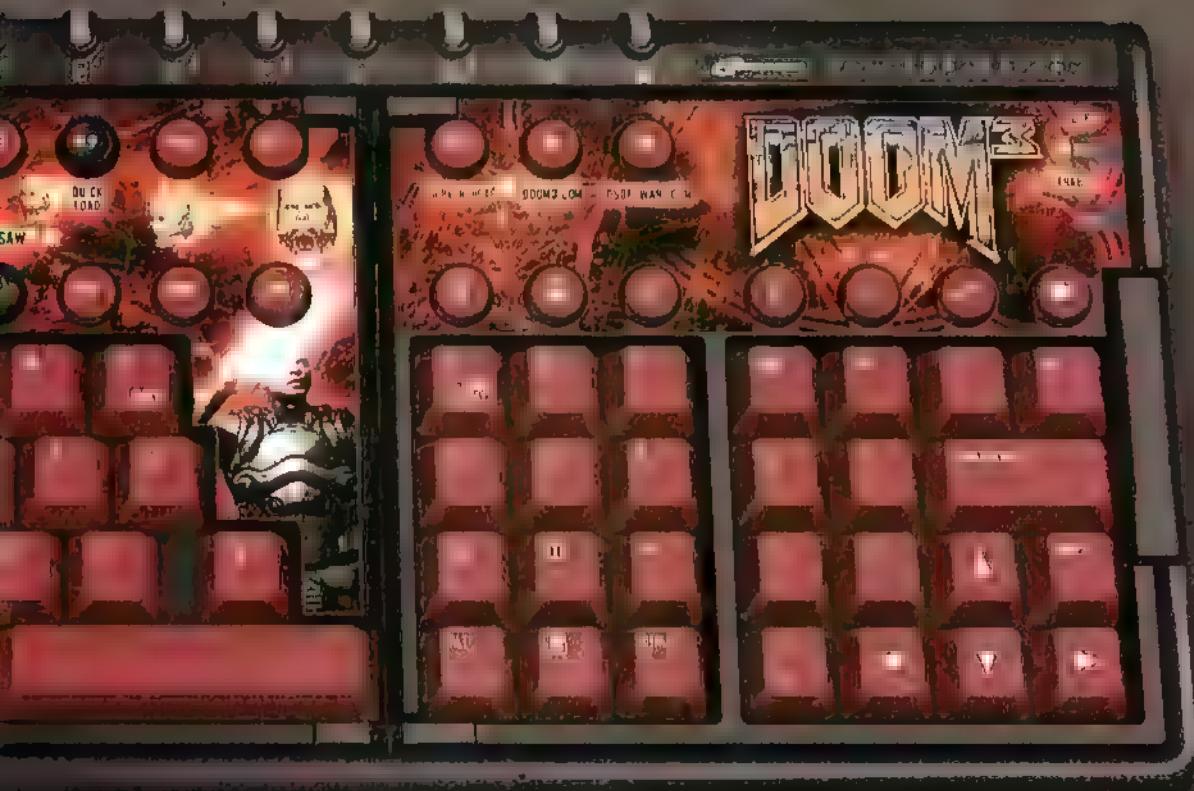
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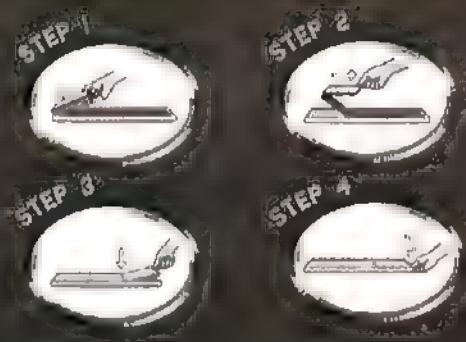
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WORLD
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CHANGES
Whether you prefer your mayhem
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armor, or spine-tingling creepiness,
the PC has it all this year, and
so does CGW in a little
feature we like to call...

BULLET

FEATURE

TIME

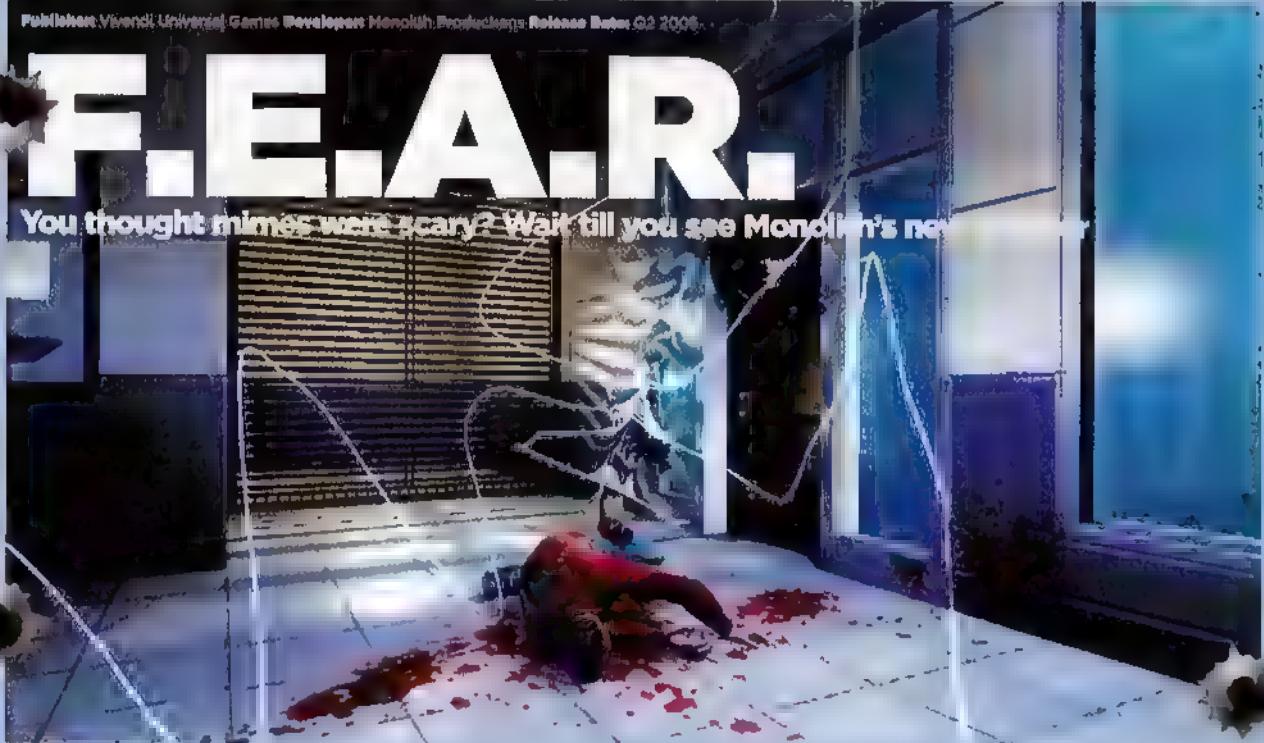
by the runnin' and gunnin' CGW edit staff



Publisher: Vivendi Universal Games | Developer: Monolith Productions | Release Date: Q3 2005

F.E.A.R.

You thought mimes were scary? Wait 'till you see Monolith's new game.



Be afraid. Be very afraid. Because Monolith is done messing around. No more satirical spy stories. No more Disney games. No more mimes and high-speed tricycle chases. For its next game, the critically acclaimed PC developer (*No One Lives Forever, Tron 2.0*) is going to do what it has wanted to do for years: scare the bejesus out of you.

F.E.A.R. is the name of the new game—and that's an apt description of what it's about, too. We got a close look at the game during a recent trip to Monolith's offices in Kirkland, Washington, and though *F.E.A.R.* is still a year away (and Monolith is still playing it close to the vest), we did manage to coax some secrets out of them. And now, well, we're more afraid than ever. Because this game looks frighteningly good.

Hell of a first day on the job

F.E.A.R. is a first-person shooter set in the very near future; you play as the new

unnamed member of an elite, supersecret strike-force team—First Encounter Assault and Recon—whose job it is, in the words of lead designer Craig Hubbard, “to handle the weird stuff that no one else can deal with.” And Monolith has a lot of weird stuff planned. In the course of just one evening, from dusk until dawn, you and your team will embark on the mission from hell—complete with near-invisible enemies, a guy who interrogates people by eating their flesh, and one creepy little girl who can apparently obliterate people at will. And that's just for openers. Let's just say it's your worst first day on a job ever.

The game begins in classic action-movie fashion. *In media res*, with you blazing down the highway in a high-speed chase. You're riding shotgun with one of your *F.E.A.R.* teammates, Jankowski (see sidebar), trying to elude an ambush by unknown assailants sprung on you while on your way toward rescuing the kid-napped employee of Armacham, a multi-

billion-dollar aerospace company, when you then get word that the Armacham headquarters itself has been attacked and that a Delta Force team had been sent in to secure the facility—only to be completely wiped out. Security-camera footage reveals a scene of utter carnage. The Delta Force team has been ripped to pieces by some kind of unknown, unseen force, and team members' blood spaks the floor and walls.

That's not all. During the car chase, the game flashes back to earlier in the day, as the *F.E.A.R.* member you have replaced, Conrad Krige, assaults the *F.E.A.R.* headquarters and liberates a prisoner—a man who interrogates people by eating their flesh.

Who is Conrad Krige? Why did he leave *F.E.A.R.* and abduct a man? Are these events related to the situation at Armacham? What the hell is going on at Armacham?

The horror, the horror

“We want you to be the hero of your own action movie,” says Hubbard, an avid cinephile who, throughout our visit, cites a number of movies, including John Woo's *Hard-Boiled*, *The Ring*, *The Matrix*, *Die Hard*,

Meet F.E.A.R.

These guys are your buddies in a world of fear.

Rowdy Bettors

The F.E.A.R. coordinator, he stays in radio contact with you from an off-site station and monitors your progress via a camera mounted on your gear. Makes a great cup of coffee.

Ian McCullough (not pictured)

The big boss who's never seen, only heard. The man who has sent you on this hellish mission—one your team normally wouldn't handle with little explanation or justification.

John Jankowski

Assault support, your primary offensive kick-up in the field.

Jim Sun-Kwon

Team marksman. Has unusually strong hearing—nearly the same frequency range a dog has. Incredibly effective at infiltration—she'll react to things you can't even hear.

Douglas Holiday

Demolitions expert—bomb disposal. Can pick up visions and intuit events from objects he touches.



and *Aliens* among the influences at play. As such, this combat-intensive thriller will not put you in the role of a wisecracking muscle-head—it will just let you be yourself. "One of our big challenges," says Hubbard, "was to get away from protagonist-driven games and instead put you in that role, with no specific voice or identity, while still trying to build the kind of full narrative experience that Monolith is known for."

And what an experience it is. Monolith walked us through an early level in the game, when you first infiltrate Armacham, and the tension—the fear—was high. Though

Monolith is quick to point out that this is a shooter and not a survival-horror game, it still gives off a creepy horror-movie style vibe, with atmospheric lighting and the sound of your own breathing and heartbeat pounding loudly as you round each corner. When the enemies do come, some are unlike any you've seen in a shooter before, including creatures that melt into walls and leap at you from out of nowhere, hidden behind thermal optical camouflage. And then there's the matter of this little girl who seems to turn people into bloody pulp just by walking by. "One of my passions is Japanese horror films," says Hubbard, "which are usually a subtler, more cerebral type of horror. This is what we're after in F.E.A.R. It's not about monsters or aliens—it's about suspense and shadows and your imagination."

Rocket launcher

Gameplaywise, Monolith is going

for straight-up FPS action. Though your teammates will often be in the field with you, you will have no direct control over them. "You are the point man," says Hubbard. "You are the combat guy—that's your role. But your team supports you in different ways. Each team member has a unique ability that will be key to gameplay. Sun-Kwon, the marksman, for example, can hear in a frequency range almost like a dog's, making her strong at infiltration, while Holiday, the demolitions expert, can intuit events and pick up visions merely by touching objects.

But the heart of the game will be you kicking ass—often literally, in fact, because, along with the expected arsenal of guns, you'll be able to use your legs to land some devastating kicks. The developers are modeling your entire body into the game—not just a hand, as in many shooters—meaning you'll actually be able to see and "feel" your body get knocked across a room.

"A cinematic combat experience" is what Monolith is after, in the words of Chris Hewitt, director of development. And to realize this, the company has abandoned the LithTech graphics engine in favor of a brand-new engine that uses the latest DirectX 9 rendering technology to provide an incredible amount of detail. The graphics are "per pixel lit," which means that every single pixel rendered in the game is

evaluated for lighting and color—pretty much as detailed as you can possibly go—an effect not

possible prior to the arrival of DirectX 9 graphics cards. The goal here is not to impress you with technology—it's to immerse you deeper into the story. "We want our technology to support the game, not the other way around," says Hewitt. "Monolith has always tried to take a more cinematic approach with strong characters and story. So it was really exciting for us to take this opportunity to revamp the tech, to get us closer to a more photo-realistic, movielike experience while still retaining our strengths of creating compelling characters and dialogue."

Fear itself

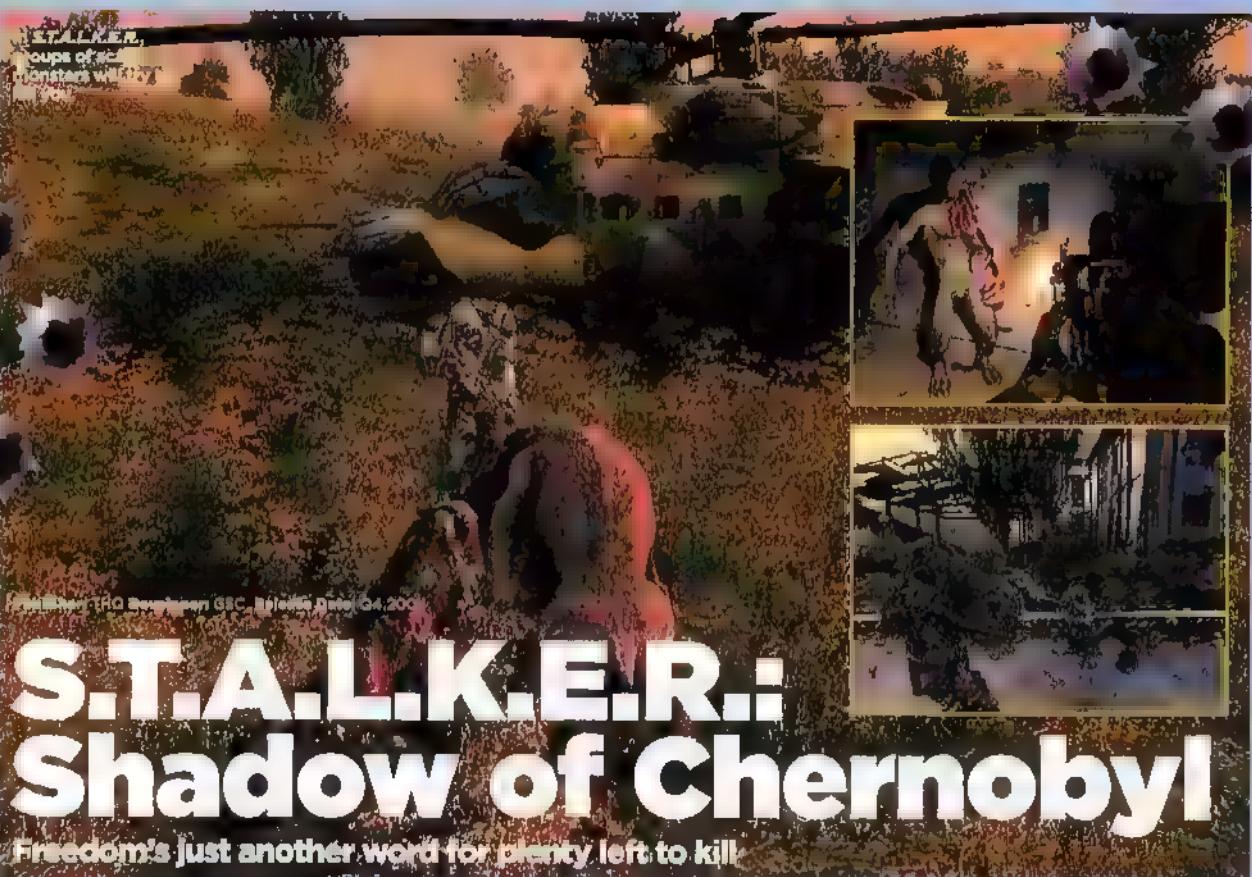
F.E.A.R. is still a year away, and there is plenty that the team is not yet ready to reveal. But look at the screens. Look at Monolith's track record—it has made one awesome shooter after another over the past decade. Look at the trail of bloody footprints that creepy girl is leaving behind. And then ask yourself: Do you really want to miss this game? Maybe you're too afraid.

One odd factoid here—and a nice glimpse into a game company's creative process—is that Monolith's original concepts for F.E.A.R. date all the way back to around 1998. Those concepts ultimately morphed into a game of a totally different nature: *No One Lives Forever*, a '60s-style spy spoof.

"After we made *Shogo*," says Hubbard, "we talked to a lot of different publishers. We had an initial concept for this game in '98—*you are the hero* of an action movie, but it was constantly evolving and changing. We ended up going with Fox Interactive as a publisher, and it was the collaboration with them that turned it into a '60s spy thing."

"The first spy element came in when I saw *The Avengers*, which is a terrible movie but has awesome art direction. I had that very modern, high-tech feel with a '60s aesthetic, and I thought that was a cool combination. So we started with that, but over the course of the project, it became a '60s game. We had a lot of fun with the results, but it certainly wasn't what we set out to make initially."

From F.E.A.R. to NOLF and back



S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl

Freedom's just another word for plenty left to kill

You think property values in Chernobyl are crap now? Just wait until 2006, when a massive explosion rips through the area and makes this irradiated wasteland even deadlier. Fortunately, gamers will be the only humans allowed in the area when *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl* hits shelves late this year. As little more than glorified thieves, players will—you guessed it—stalk the blasted environments hunting for artifacts, competing or cooperating with fellow stalkers, and battling untold numbers of seriously mutated beasts.



Groups of scary stalkers will try to kill you.

It's a free country

So what makes *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* stand out from the postapocalyptic-shooter pack? Simply, the massive amount of space the game intends to give gamers. And not just space in terms of real estate to roam (though with 30 square kilometers to cover, there's plenty of that), but space in terms of how you choose to play the game and how you interact with the world. This is a game with eight entirely different potential endings, each achievable through entirely different potential styles of play.

The key to this is a unique life-simulation system that drives every creature in the game. The best example of this comes in the form of the other treasure hunters prowling the badlands. These aren't just traditionally scripted A.I. enemies. These stalkers

actively compete with you, trying to beat you to the artifacts and technology you pursue, reacting to you based on your previous behavior and reputation, and setting their own objectives with the same degree of freedom that you enjoy. You can approach them as hostiles, or you can cooperate with them and even trade goods, weapons, and equipment. Motivated by greed, cowardice, perceived advantages, and more, and occasionally operating in cans, stalkers will be the deadliest adversaries in the game.

Which isn't to say the mutated monsters you fight will be a cakewalk. Telepathy and telekinesis are just some of the tools they'll use to attack you, not to mention exploiting the cover of darkness and a keen sense of survival that will urge them to flee a losing fight to regroup and attack later. Luckily, you'll have more than 25 weapons—many with upgrades—to deal with them. More options, more choices, more freedom.

Everything is being built with the intention of creating a living, breathing, threatening, and absolutely deadly game world. From the potential attacks of seemingly benign stray dogs, to the violence of the storms generated by the weather engine, to the physics-bending unpredictability of various anomaly "mystery spots" and deadly irradiated hot zones pocking the landscape, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* may be the scariest shooter not named *Doom 3* to ship this year.





Paul Sherrill / EA / EA Games
Developer: DICE, Illusions, CCP. Release Date: Q1 2005

Battlefield 2

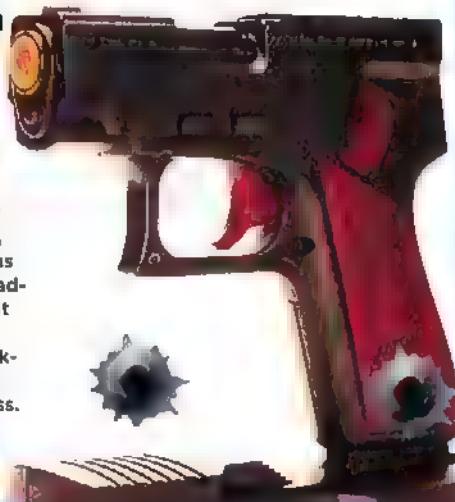
The real fight club

EFile this under "no news is good news"—there really hasn't been any big new information leaking out about *Battlefield 2*, chiefly because the developers are hard at work welding all those ones and zeroes together for their next digital masterpiece. Besides, we spilled just about every spillable bean imaginable in our July cover story. But here's a quick review in case you missed it: persistent characters and ranks, modern combat, all-new vehicles and weapons, enhanced team structure, voice support, a new and insanely detailed graphics engine, and 100-plus players fighting at once. Too bad you can't enlist until next year.

Oh, Shoot!

Happiness = warm gun

GWe've seen just about every reinvention of the mouse conceivable—until now. MonsterGecko's *PistolMouse FPS* is a plastic-molded gun built for first-person-shooter games. How does it work? Pretty much like an optical mouse, except there are a bunch of buttons mapped on to it for alt firing, reloading, and quick weapon switching. It feels a little awkward at first, but once you get use to it, you'll be taking potshots like a pro—and you'll look like a major tool in the process. (www.monstergecko.com)



Publisher: DreamCatcher Games
Developer: People Can Fly
Release Date: December 2004

Painkiller

More pain, more gain



Details are sketchy at the moment, but we have found out that the high-octane killing spree that is *Painkiller* is slated for a glib-tastic expansion to ship this holiday season. Nothing like some meaty chunks of sadocommandos for stocking stuffers, eh? The *Battle Out of Hell* add-on will sport 10 fresh single-player chapters, new multiplayer modes and maps, some new weapons, new enemies, and new tarot cards, and it will ship with a map editor and the SDK. The developers are also looking into implementing co-op play but haven't decided yet.



Publisher: UBI Soft • Developer: Gearbox • Release Date: Q4

Brothers in Arms

No, it's not a square dance simulator



If there's one thing more crowded than the first-person-shooter arena, it's the World War II first-person-shooter arena. All the games look good, sound great, and have thrilling action—so how can a developer hope to stand out from the pack? By introducing a healthy dose of tactics and authenticity, that's how. Gearbox has been toiling on its labor of love, *Brothers in Arms*, for a couple of years now, and from what we've seen, all that work and research is paying off in spades.

Central command

Sure, you'll have ample opportunity to personally fill Nazis full of lead in *Brothers in Arms*, but so will your squad—and they'll do it under your direct orders. As Sgt. Matt Baker, leader of Baker's

Dozen, a real squad of 101st Airborne paratroopers, you'll lead your team (each member based on

a real person) through the eight-day invasion of Normandy. A simple point-and-click interface lets you divide your soldiers into fire and assault teams, letting one group lay down suppressing fire while you lead the assault squad on a flanking maneuver against an entrenched German position. Your soldiers will fight intelligently even without your direct orders, seeking cover, finding targets, and moving to better positions. The downside is that the German soldiers have the same strong A.I. and will use tactics to take you out as well.

Tanks are also highly controllable. You don't just jump in and man the turret—you actually give the tank commander orders,



The realistic line of tanks in the game makes direct command of your infantry crucial.

telling him where to go and designating targets. And while you can man the machine gun on the medium tanks, the tanks are smart enough to use their main guns and support guns to fire independently on different targets.

Tanks make great moving cover for your squad, but U.S. armor is hugely vulnerable to antitank weapons. The good news? After wiping out a German



The American soldier is surrounded by German soldiers from stupor standing out in the middle of a field. He directs the Germans to seek cover while they shoot at you.



Armed with Thompsons, an assault team creeps up on a German position.

squad, you can use its antitank weapons to support your own tanks by blowing up panzers and the like. Still, try as you might, the commander of that first tank, Sgt. George Risner, isn't going to make it to the next level—he died in real life, he dies in the game, and the loss of this tank is what gives *Dead Man's Corner* its name.

In the end, it might be that hard truth that makes this game truly stand out. Re-creations of famous battles in games such as *Call of Duty* and *Medal of*

Publisher: Ubisoft | Developer: Ubisoft Montreal | Release Date: 2006

Far Cry Expansion/ Far Cry 2 *Cry and cry again*

Ubisoft's 2006 drop-in-and-play *Far Cry* expansion pack *Far Cry 2* was the first to release the mod-making SDK by the time *Far Cry* hit the shelves. It's hard to say if this is the best of the best, will work their way onto a best-of disc. *Medal of Honor* will include a better save system, too. Who knows? That may have to wait for *Brothers in Arms*. The only *Far Cry* that's immediate future is *Far Cry 2*, which is made by Ubisoft Montreal.

Honor: Allied Assault may produce dozens of "gee-whiz" moments, but *Brothers in Arms*' detailing of the brutal, real-life experiences of one squad made up of real men you get to know (two of whom won Medals of Honor) may create a sustained "oh my god" moment—one that elevates it above any other shooter.

Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developers: 2015 Release Date: October 2004

Men of Valor

No fortunate sons

2015 has been pretty tight-lipped about the PC version of this shooter, limiting most of the released information to the Xbox version of the game. Until now. The PC version is a sharper and more detailed game with much richer models and environments.

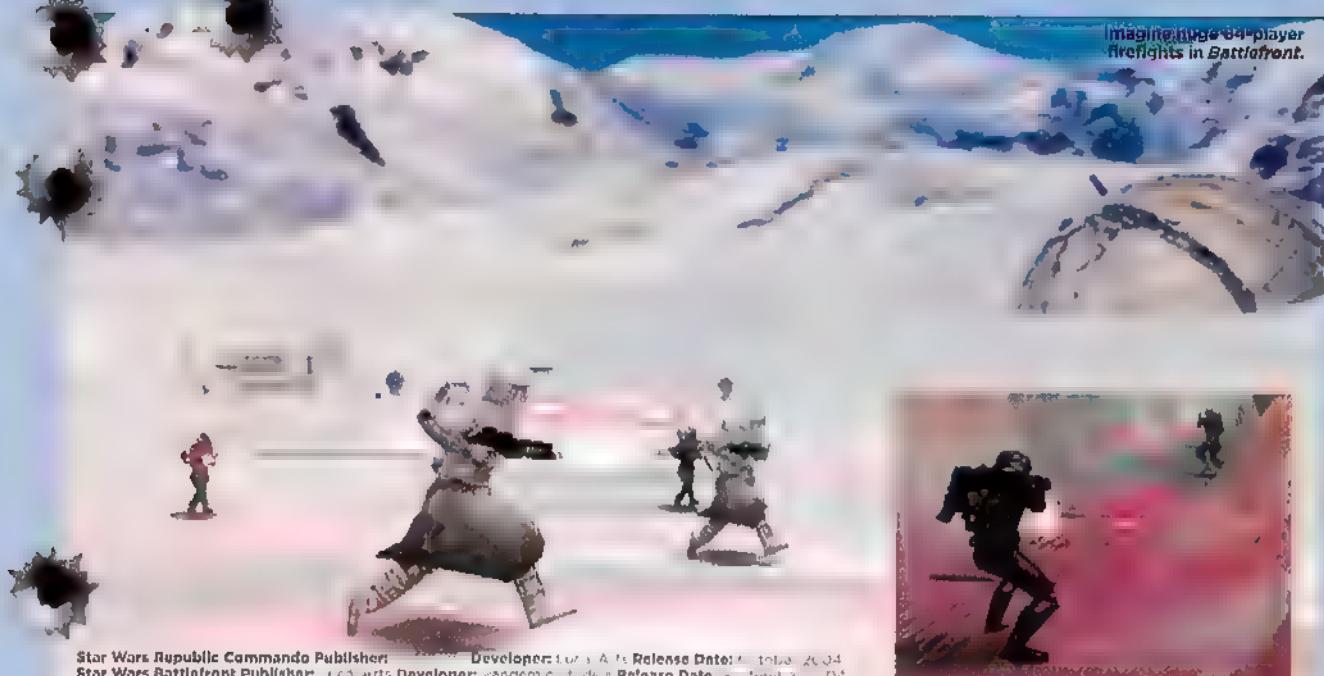
All this graphical wonderment is in the service of a game that has a classic war-movie feel. It's the kind of Vietnam flick that has to have a big good ol' boy named Tex and a nerdy guy with big glasses and aspirations of writing the great American novel. If you catch a game character writing a love letter, don't keep your distance. Because you

just know he's going to get it.

The developers are filling the game with dramatic, concentrated story-telling moments that feature music from the period used to heighten the emotional intensity. One level begins with a group of soldiers riding in a caravan of trucks with James Brown's *Papa's Got a Brand New Bag* blaring from one of the radios. Suddenly, an explosion rips through the air and a field of rice erupts in flames. From there, it's right into the action, as fighting breaks out in Vietnam's dense green jungles.

This is a game with a *Medal of Honor* pedigree in the design team. Our hopes are high.





Star Wars Republic Commando Publisher: LucasArts Developer: LucasArts Release Date: October 2004
 Star Wars Battlefront Publisher: LucasArts Developer: Pandemic Studios Release Date: September 2004

Star Wars Games

"Star Wars, talkin' 'bout those...Star Wars..."

In a studio far, far away (San Rafael, CA, to be precise), the folks at LucasArts are working feverishly to finish not one, but two significant new first-person shooters. In these very pages a few months back, we broke the news of *Star Wars Battlefront* and *Star Wars Republic Commando*. Both games offer up unique takes on the genre with, of course, the trademark *Star Wars* seal of approval.

The simplest, quickest way to sum up *Battlefront* would be to call it *Battlefield*

1942 in Spaaaaace! That, however, isn't giving this game enough credit. Sure, it has that tried-and-true concept of two sides duking it out for supremacy of control points, but it's the variety of the specialists and the gameplay that sets *Battlefront* apart--and that isn't even going into how cool it is to be a stormtrooper driving an AT-ST and squashing the opposition. Of the 17 missions that comprise the game (seven during the Clone Wars, 10 from the classic trilogy's Galactic Civil War), we were psyched to sit down and play

through the Hoth level. After all, who doesn't want to crush the Rebel Alliance under their shiny metal Jackboot heel?

The battles are massive and work whether you're playing from the *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs*-ish third-person view or within first person. In the matches we played, the huge level could easily house 64-player LAN matches, with plenty of room to spare. Producer Jim Tso says that on high-end machines, they've crammed almost 1,000 bots onto a single map. That's insane! The other revolutionary part we've



"You go out there first!" "No, you go first!"



What happens to Wookiees that aren't housebroken.



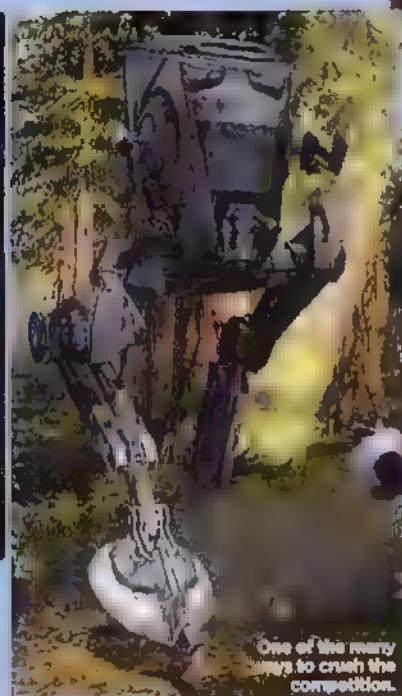
already talked about in great detail (March 2004, pages 40-42) is the galactic conquest mode (player campaign). Claim victories by beating back the opposition on different planets and gain advantages in battle. Use a Death Star or fight side by side with an A.I.-controlled Darth Maul.

Behind the helmet

Republic Commando takes a different approach. Instead of staging massive firefights, you're in control of a small squad of elite troopers. Armed with the

versatile DC-17 assault rifle (add-on components let it do everything from blast rockets to snipe), you're behind enemy lines in the Clone Wars. The entire game is played through a minimalist visor view that tells you everything without yanking you from the game world. In the early builds we've played, the controls are smooth and the atmosphere feels right.

More important, though, are your squadmates. They stack up on doors to breach, take up sniper positions, and man turrets—all at your command through an



One of the many ways to crush the competition.

easy contextual system. A hologram of what you want the troopers to do illuminates in-game. It's still too soon to tell, but what will make or break this game is the A.I. of your team. Will they follow commands intelligently or just run into or around bullets? We're hoping for the best.

Publisher: Groovy Games Developer: Digital Extremes Release Date: Spring 2005

Pariah

For social lepers only!

i Digital Extremes, the talent behind the *Unreal* franchise, is deviating from pure multiplayer in its post-apocalyptic game, *Pariah*. As Dr. Jack Mason, you have crash-landed on the barren wasteland of Earth. You have 16 hours before a decontamination procedure destroys you and the other crash

survivors. Gameplay will include vehicles, upgradeable modular weaponry, and such systems as learning A.I. and cost-based healing, in which a serum injection boosts your health, but the longer you heal, the blurrier the screen gets and stays (for awhile at least). *Pariah* is in mid-development, so lots can change, but we like the direction this game is taking.



Publisher

Developer

Release Date

Tribes: Vengeance

Up, up, and away



Buckle your seatbelts: *Tribes: Vengeance*, the newest entry into the fan-favorite *Tribes* franchise, is about to take off. Developer Irrational Games has taken up the torch to bring you the fifth entry in a classic series that began with 1994's mech-combat game *Metaltech: EarthSiege*, evolved into *StarSiege*, and finally became *Tribes*.

But the name isn't the only confusing part—an overly steep learning curve has always been the *Tribes* series' biggest bottleneck, though it has also served to create a small but rabid cult following for fans that just can't get enough of the fast-paced jetpack action. Irrational has built *Vengeance* from the ground up, crafting what promises to be a more intuitive interface in order to appeal to gamers on a much broader level. But can *Tribes* hang with the big dogs?

Vengeance is definitely throwing some

distinctive elements into the mix—after all, not many FPS games give you the chance to fly around with jetpacks. Also, what we've seen of the environments so far indicates some very tight, creative level design that emphasizes the game's "freedom of movement" mantra. Plenty of quirky multiplayer modes abound and should extend things beyond the same tired old death-match fare, marking *Vengeance* as one of the up-and-coming multiplayer shooters to keep an eye on this year.

Quake 4

While "Multi" has been the operative word since some *Quake* 4 art leaked out last year, in fact, Id has threatened to blacklist anybody who talks out of turn or blows information on any Id-engine-based game. You know, like how the game is a sequel to *Quake II*, not *Quake III: Arena*? Or how right now Raven is figuring out how to strike the balance between single- and multiplayer and whether it should incorporate vehicles, a branching story line, co-op play, and so on? Ooops.



Publisher: Vivendi Universal Developer: Valve Release Date: Allegedly late summer 2004

Half-Life 2

Coming soon?

 The game nears completion—Valve promises. We had a chance to lay our hands on the game, and we've got to tell you, we're still excited to see the game box finally show up. But how long will it be before we see a *Counter-Strike 2*? And dare we mention *Team Fortress 2*?

Publisher: Activision

Doom 3

Soon coming?

 The game that refuses to ship is on its way. Seriously, the developers swear. In fact, the absence of Id from this year's E3 means that it's in full-on crunch mode. Insiders say the perfectionists from Mesquite, TX, are just putting on the final polish at this point. Don't be surprised if you see a review of the game in our next issue.





AHEAD OF THE GAME

BACK TO SCHOOL!

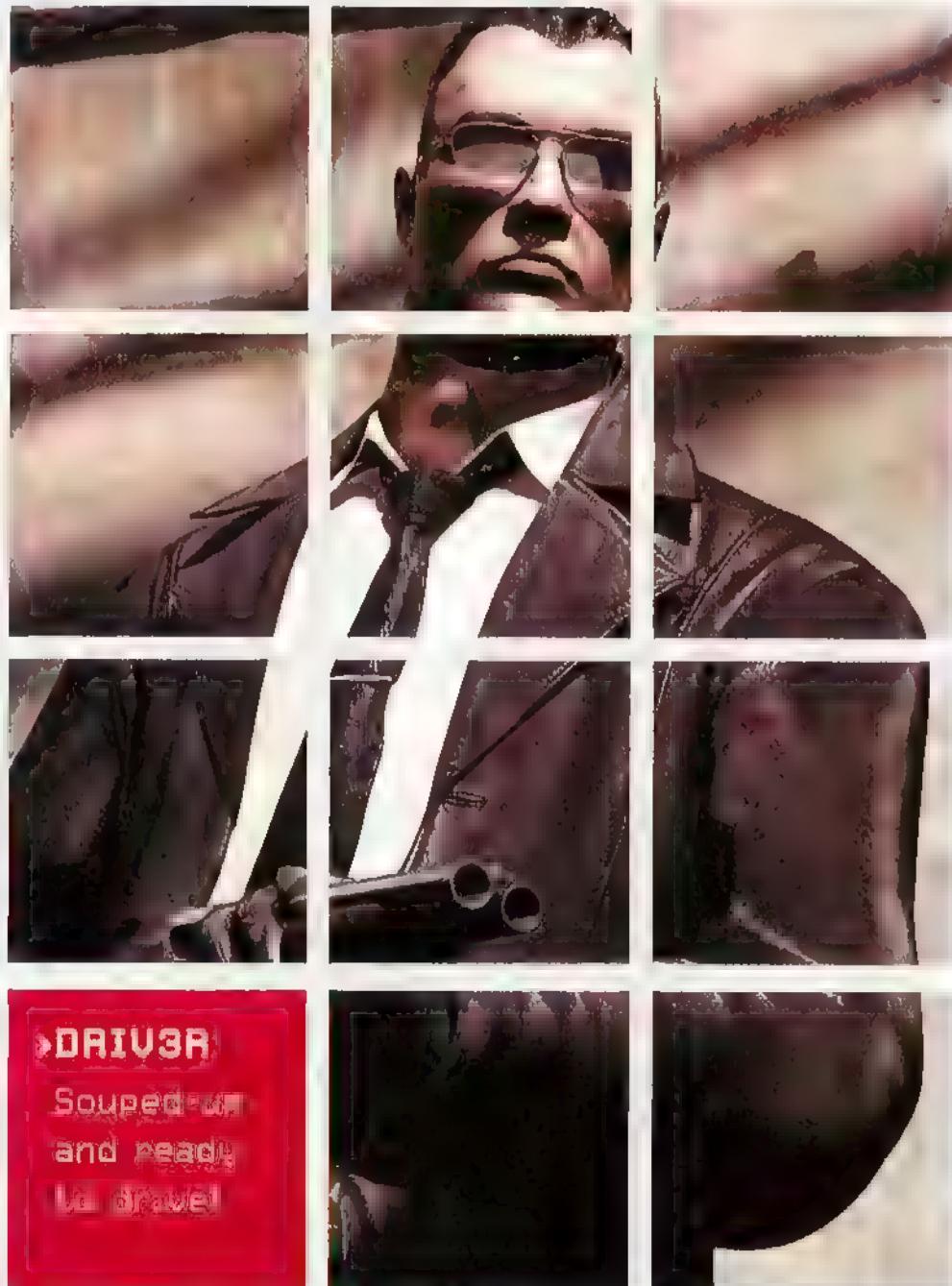
Gear up for the year

Not sure which piece of hardware goes best with your games? We pick the best phones for your budget so that you don't have to!

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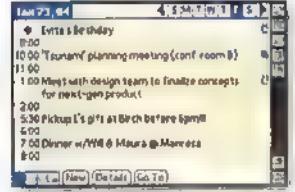
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ESSENTIAL TOOLS FOR SCHOOL

Gear up for school with the best mobile phones for your game—all within your budget

Cell phones and videogames started off as an unlikely pair—first, there was the simple game of *Snake*, and today, they form a huge and fast-growing industry. As phones have evolved, so have the games—and in some cases, vice versa. Here are our picks for the best gaming phones for this fall in three different budget ranges.

LOW

LG VX6000

If you want a no-frills flip phone that has the power to play games, check out this stylish entry-level LG. A surprising choice with a decent camera but no Bluetooth, this LG boasts slick design, a good color screen, and a pleasantly compact size, all of which make the LG a fine and affordable starting point \$20-\$80 with activation

Available on Verizon

Runner-up:

Sony Ericsson T616

A Swiss Army knife among phones, this Sony Ericsson is cute and pocket sized. Don't let that fool you, though. It packs a full feature list into that tiny package, including infrared, Bluetooth, a camera, and one bright color screen (though it has a tendency to smudge too easily). Games that make use of the numeric keypad fare better than the ones that call upon the T616's directional pad. Instead of a normal pad, this model features a little toggling thumbstick. It works great for navigating the unit's colorful OS, but during the height of gaming, this little stick causes too many accidental presses.

\$50-\$100 with activation

Available on Cingular, T-Mobile



MID

N-Gage QD

Who would have ever thought that the much-maligned N-Gage would make its way on to a recommendation list? Among cell phones, the new N-Gage QD has a clear advantage for gaming, thanks to its shape and button design. The buttons are still hard and tiny, but the D-pad works much smoother than it did in the phone's previous incarnation. The original N-Gage's D-pad's center-press button has been surgically removed, reinvented as a new button, making games and phone operation much easier.

Plus, you no longer have to open the phone just to swap a game; the QD adds an easy-to-access MMC panel on the outside of the phone. Most important, there's no more side talking, which was only the most ill-conceived idea in all of cell-phone design-dom. The QD has lost the MP3 and radio functions, but they won't be missed. Much changed, much evolved, the QD paves an optimistic future for cell-phone gaming.

\$200 without service activation; estimated \$100 with service activation

Available on Cingular, T-Mobile



HIGH

Sanyo SCP-5500

Sprint PCS is currently pushing two phones as the new multimedia poster children for its service: Sanyo's SCP-5500 and Samsung's SPH-A680. Both come loaded with bright screens and pack a decent CPU for gaming on the go. Sure, Samsung's phone takes better pictures with its built-in digital camera, but this isn't a beauty contest—we want to be able to play games. The SCP-5500 is tops because of its bigger screen (which lets you better see what's going down) and a button layout that won't induce carpal-tunnel syndrome inside of five seconds. \$349.99 without service activation; \$199.99-\$249.99 with activation

Available on Sprint

FUN FACT:

Gaming is the number one reason phone owners are considering purchasing a new phone. Sixty percent of people surveyed said it was their top reason.

—Ziff Davis Media Game Group Survey, June 2004

DRIV3R R3V13W>>

Better than the console game?

Finally, a cell-phone game that actually lives up to its console counterpart (or in this case, perhaps exceeds it). *DRIV3R* has plenty of story, action, and missions for a portable game, let alone one on a cell phone. It comes complete with a full-length single-player mode and some driving minigames, creating a package that could keep you entertained for weeks—a rare case for mobile games.

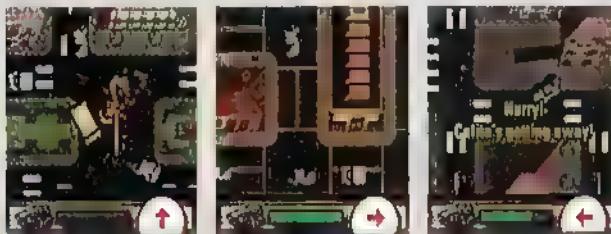
In single-player mode, you are

FBI agent Tanner. You go deep undercover to infiltrate a Miami gang profiting from stolen cars, and that's where the fun begins. What makes this game different from all other cell-phone titles is its *Grand Theft Auto* feel (the earlier *Grand Theft Auto* games, at least). Although you are in a car most of the time, there are a multitude of ways to use your vehicle. Missions include protecting a car, evading cops, and even crashing into enemies (these opportunities are also

accessible in the minigames section). There are cities to explore, gangs to penetrate, and cars to steal. (Yes, you can steal cars by blocking them and hopping in.)

Another valuable feature is that your progress is always saved, making it easy for you to just flip the cell phone open and start playing from where you left off. This beats having to start over every time you've got to power down to pay attention to whatever it is your teacher or boss is spouting on about.

The only bone to be picked with *DRIV3R* is its poor assortment of vehicles. Your choices are a sedan, truck, motorcycle, or muscle car. Each comes in different colors, but that's about it. More car models from different decades and more color variations would be great, but of



course, this isn't too big a deal, and it doesn't take away from the addictiveness of the game.

For those of you looking for a GTA-style experience on the go, *DRIV3R* likely won't disappoint.

SCORE

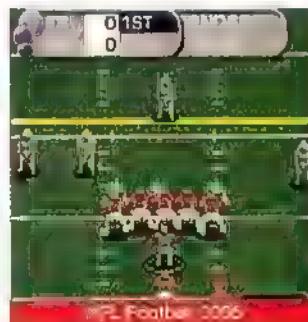
 **9/10**

CHAT CODES

Did you know? By playing the mobile version of *DRIV3R*, you can obtain codes to unlock things in the console version of the game. Untockables include access to different weapons, all cities and missions available, invincibility, and the freedom of not having the cops on your back.

ARE YOU READY FOR SOME FOOTBALL?

Can't get enough Madden or NFL2K in your life? Try tackling this season's mobile games



With football season right around the corner, Sorrent and Jamdat are finalizing this year's installments in their flagship mobile football series for release this September. For those pigskin nuts that wish they could have a game like *Madden* or *NFL2K* on the go, these two picks may be just what the doctor ordered. For info on how to get these or any of the games mentioned in this 1UP Wireless Guide, make sure you check out our expanded coverage at wireless.1UP.com.

FOX SPORTS FOOTBALL '05 PUBLISHER: SORRENT

Sorrent's football game delivers the look and feel of a Fox Sports football broadcast right on your phone, with menus just like those on Sunday's matches—it even features Fox's NFL theme music! Beyond the flashy stuff, *Fox Sports Football '05* has the largest playbook, with over 100 plays and dozens of formations based on down and yardage situations. There are also some *NFL Street*-style over-the-top moves, such as flaming smoke trails when you're

powered up and special zoomed-in animated tackles. And for those competitive types, online score posting will be available.

NFL FOOTBALL 2005 PUBLISHER: JAMDAT

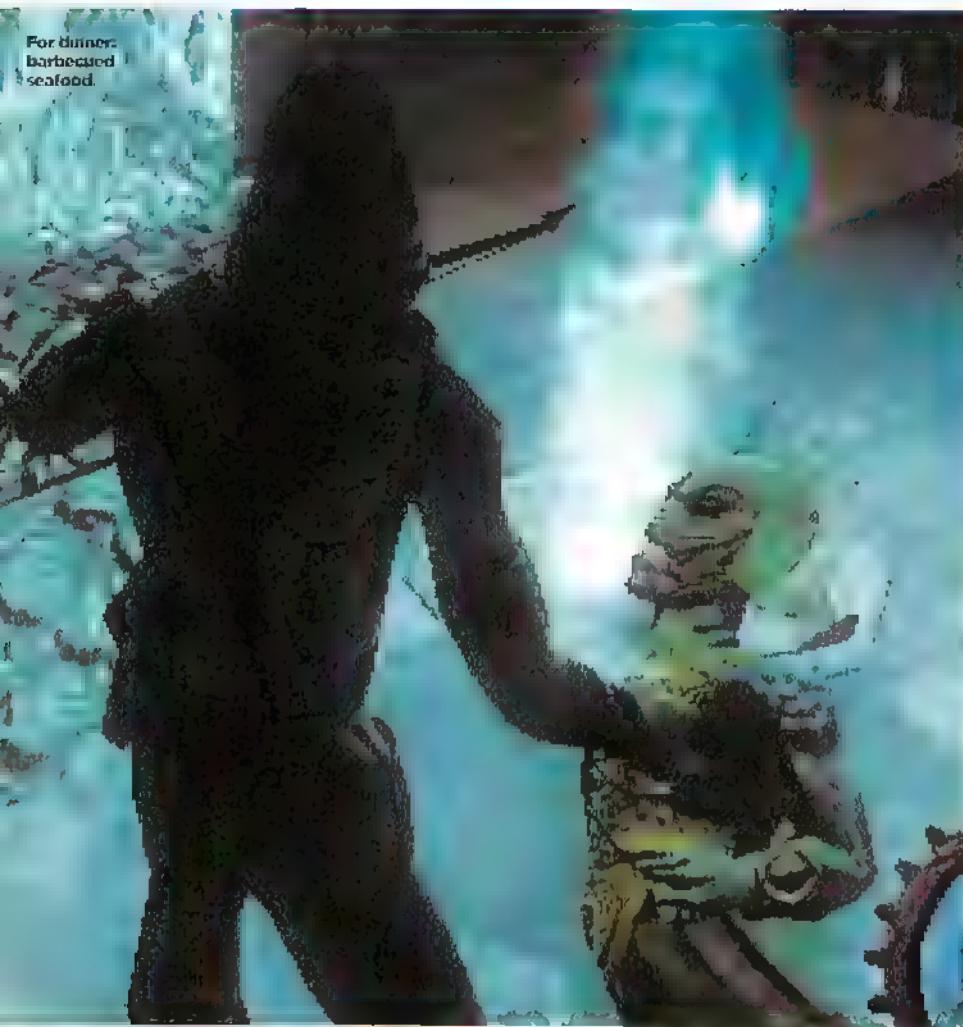
Fully licensed by the NFL, Jamdat's game offers all 32 NFL teams, players, and rosters, making it the most realistic football title on the mobile market. It also features gameplay more akin to what you're used to with console football games like *Madden* and *NFL2K*. Seasons are set up for seven or 16 games, so

MOBILE FANTASY FOOTBALL

Your life as you know it will soon be over. Never mind checking your fantasy football stats on a PC, now you can play right on your phone. In *Fox Sports Fantasy Football* from Sorrent. Featuring an easy-to-navigate interface and community-driven content, you'll be able to join leagues and compete on a weekly basis. For more info, visit our Fantasy Football club at wireless.1UP.com.

you can dictate how long you want to play. And for those players obsessed with stats, *NFL 2005* keep close tabs on just about everything: passing yards, rushing yards, interceptions, tackles, total touchdowns, field goals, sacks, and more.

For dinner:
barbecued
seafood.



- Rag-doll body physics make for some interesting shots.

An expert guard
and bright light
would be for
the night.

Eldest Son | Ion Storm | Stealth-Action | 128MB RAM | MFC | REQUIRES Pentium 4 1.8 GHz, 256MB RAM, Pixel Shader 1.1 videocard, 3GB install | REQUIRES Pentium 4 3GHz, 512MB RAM | F. None

Thief: Deadly Shadows

Steal this game!

Pick up and hide people in the shadows. Or toss them into unergonomic positions.



I want to be, to
be a Besleger!
Be-sle-ger!
Besleger!



73

You'd think Maxis and EA would sue the pants off this Sims rip-off. Then you realize: the game's characters don't have pants.



74

Novologic's
Battlefield killer is
a big, fat winner

Like a blackjack upside the head, we were initially knocked out by *Thief: Deadly Shadows*. It eased the pain that was *Deus Ex*: *Invisible War*. While *Thief* shares a game engine, stealth gameplay, and similar A.I. routines with *Deus Ex*, Ion Storm's medieval outing stole away our attention. The only downside: This game also shares the curse of being rushed out the castle door.

Third-story man

Garrett's the hero's name, and thieving's his game. With his subtle manipulation of shadows, ability to move quietly, and quiver full of magical elemental arrows, this medieval neophyte could make his way through Fort Knox without breaking a sweat. His former clan, the Keepers, has discovered that Garrett lies at the center of a great unfolding prophecy. Garrett must choose his alliances carefully as he uncovers the game's increasingly treacherous plot.

The story starts out at a snail's pace, but once it finally picks up, it'll drive you on to the finish. It helps that this surreal medieval city is fleshed out through little injections of detail. For instance, in the various books lying about, you might find excerpts from Hammerite literature, a religion on seemingly founded entirely upon hammering people to death. Hammer time!

The Hammerites are rivals of another cult, the Pagans. Deeper into the game, you can increase your standing with a cult by doing simple favors for it. With allied standing, these acolytes are more likely to give you a friendly hello than beat you dead when you venture into their territories within the central city.

A central hub city strings together all the different levels of the game. You'll have to work your way around this rather large burg to find your next heist to pull. Annoyingly, load screens separate each of the major parts of the city, but while you wander around, you can pickpocket the random NPCs milling about.

Shadow play

Perhaps the greatest new design kick is the third-person viewpoint. Being able to see Garrett and the shadows he crawls through makes stealth easier; it also helps that the visuals are anchored by amazing lights and shadows. Details such as automatically switching to first person when you've drawn your bow maintain the immersion into character. *Thief* works so well in third person mode that it makes you wonder why it wasn't offered earlier. First-person mode is still there for diehards.

From either perspective, the game is thick with tension, as the faint and not-so-faint sounds of enemies can be heard every inch of the way. "What's that?" a guard will wonder. "I heard something." While it might



Thief works so well in third-person mode that it makes you wonder why it wasn't offered earlier.

sound hokey, these "shout-outs" pull you into the game. Deeper in, enemies become increasingly complex and interesting, and their audio cues follow suit. For example, zombies eerily grunt out sounds instead of speaking. Then there are enemies who just come right out and kill other enemies, adding another layer of creepy believability.

Tools of the trade

Garrett has an arsenal of varied weapons to keep himself hidden from his enemies. A water arrow can douse a torch or dissipate blood. A noisemaker arrow can distract a guard just long enough for Garrett to sneak past. But other than the arrows and enemy-stunning flashbombs, Garrett's tools don't seem as useful as they should be. For instance, take the climbing gloves. These gloves are poor replacements for the trick rope arrows from *Thief II*. The gloves won't let you climb from rooftop to rooftop—arbitrary invisible barriers impede your progress. Too often you might overthink and try to find some meticulous route via climbing when really, the solution is just to turn left at the door.

Why didn't Ion Storm create truly useful tools to reimagine the gameplay and level design? Are there tools that let you go back to previously burgled sections to reach some hidden area through a crazy new trick? Nope. Instead, you get practice locks to put in your apartment. Whoopie.

Early parole

This lack of innovation smacks of "not quite finished"—just like the cinematics. Most are beautifully done with a rich illustration style. And then there are some

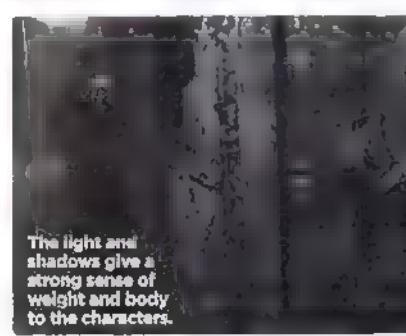
extremely out-of-place, low-detail ones. Last-minute filler? That's what I'm betting.

Sad, yes, but not as glaring a problem as a bug that resets the difficulty level of the game after saving. Most players probably won't even catch on to the problem, but fans who want a true challenge have to download the patch. Compared with network malfunctions and game-crashing bugs, the lack of a truly hard "difficult" setting is a lesser evil, but one that should have been hammered out before release nonetheless.

If there's one last problem to cite, it's how repetitive the game can be. Most of the game follows the hide-and-go-thief pattern. Despite the large arsenal, you will find yourself using just a few items. Then again, stealth is also the best part of the game. Lurking in the shadows, waiting as the enemy passes you by—it's during these quiet moments that the game glows. **Johnny Liu**

Verdict

Thou shalt steal, for it is good.



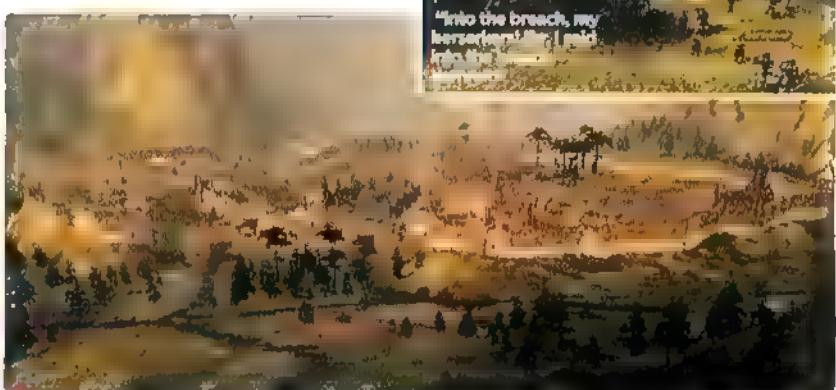
The light and shadows give a strong sense of weight and body to the characters.

PCBL SHER: DreamCatcher Games DEV: PC: Primal Software C: 4.495 MB: 1.5GB RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 1.5GB install RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4.2GHz, 384MB RAM, 64MB videocard MULTIMEDIA: Internet, LAN (2-9 players)

Besieger

In the immortal words of the Vikings: "ARRRR!"

Besieger, in the tradition of Conan movies, combines reality and fantasy, Vikings wage war on Cimmerians in a world of ogres, magic, and flying Viking ships (I bet ol' Leif would have killed for one of those). The story? Korlin (Conan?) goes off to find the sword of Crom (Krom?), and naughty sister Mara takes it as her cue to spin up the magic and conquer his kingdom. Enter Vikings, and let the mayhem ensue. That's pretty much all you really need to know—or all you should want to know, because delving deeper into the gaping holes of this RTS' plot would drive you insane.



► Besieger does offer up the eye candy in scenery and fortress design.

Barbarians: the people-person's conquerors

The game seems solid on the surface and has some nice innovations. For one, your population becomes your most important resource. You can draft all of those resource-gathering peons into the military by walking them through the appropriate barracks for training as berserkers, spear throwers, or other types of fighters. If you need a stronger infrastructure, you can discharge soldiers from the army by walking them back through the barracks.

Hero units, no big innovation, are present but can become liabilities. While some are almost too powerful, such as ChaZimm, the centaur warrior who can

landscapes make battles into a feast for the eyes. However, once you've gotten past the eye candy (which takes about five minutes) you find your enjoyment greatly diminished by the game's flaws.

Camera ob-friggin'-scura

The first level opens, and I place my hand on the keyboard to adjust the camera angle. Wait—did I say keyboard? Yes. Well, while the mouse would have made for a more intuitive interface, I hope that the keyboard controls are done well. No such luck. From there on, it's no longer a battle of Vikings versus Cimmerians, but one of me versus the hideously inept camera controls. Thank Thor for the pause function. I suspect Primal

Hero units can be too powerful or so weak, they're essentially useless.

run down and slice up whole groups of enemy warriors, others, such as Olga the Healer, are incredibly fragile and must be kept away from battles, making them also incredibly useless.

The A.I. tends to ride the short bus, especially in the pathfinding department. After I throw my men at an enemy fortress and breach the wall (which is rather fun, since the game includes siege towers and battering rams), they can't seem to swarm through in that satisfying manner the hype on the game's box led me to expect. In fact, half of them ended up scattered across the countryside, getting picked off by archers.

The terrain is where Besieger really shines. Fully rendered deformable and destructible

included that gem not to allow you to better manage and command your units, but to give you more time to struggle with the crappy excuse for a camera. It's inconceivable that the development team at Primal couldn't see what a horrible function of gameplay it was going to inflict on us.

It all adds up to a fairly witting disappointment. The game promises to be a more action-oriented Stronghold, but its lame A.I., awful controls, and poorly conceived hero units hamstring it. **Stephen Gehringer**

Verdict

Great if you like beautifully rendered landscapes, not so great if you like good A.I. and usable controls.

Eidos EP: Deep Silver Simut Simulator AO: 1.000 Pentium 4 1.6GHz, 256MB RAM, 700MB install, 32MB videocard
RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4 1.5GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard / CPU: 1.6GHz / None

Singles: Flirt up Your Life!

And so we bid adieu to Western civilization...

If Eidos had been thinking, it wouldn't have charged you \$29.95 for this game up front. No, instead it would have collected it piecemeal, requiring you to plunk a greasy token into your PC every time a motorized screen crept down your monitor, concealing the not-quite-tilting spectacle beyond the foggy glass.

Seriously, what the hell is the rationalization for this downloadable game? Don't the designers know that anyone with Internet access, \$29.95 worth of credit card buying power, and a hankering to see boobies, schlongs, and pubic topiary might just have a few options that involve seeing actual real people showing off their boobies, schlongs, and pubic topiary? Never has Internet porn seemed so reputable.

The Sins

Singles is *The Sims* without all that pixelization during the naked parts—more Bob Nudie than Bob Newbie. You control the empty lives of two exaggeratedly anatomically correct polygonal models who go to work, cook food, take showers, and watch television. And, oh yeah, they sometimes get in bed and bump uglies. Sometimes the guy model stands behind the female model and polishes her insanely conical bosom. *Singles* lacks the charm, humor, design options, gameplay possibilities, storytelling, and enjoyment of *The Sims*, replacing these elements with sub-Three's *Company*, sniggering double entendre, monstrous genitalia, and a personal sense of residual funk that the sturdiest psychic squeegee cannot remove.

Both members of your breeding pair have needs you must work to fulfill. Exactly like *The Sims*, the ambulatory sex organs you manipulate in *Singles* have needs such as Hunger, Body, Fun, and Surroundings. Exactly unlike *The Sims*, they also have needs such as Romance, Relationship, and (drumroll, please) Sensuality. It's that last one that tries so mightily and fails so utterly to bring the limp gameplay to life. Scores are accrued on a 10-point system for these last metrics, and as your characters' comfort level with each other grows, new actions like "French Kiss" are unlocked until you hit the jackpot and the whole reason for purchasing this abomination, "Do the Wild Thing." Never has the Wild Thing been less wild, with the characters not so much having sex with each other as they have sex on each other. It's as mechanical and arousing as placing a blender on top of a food processor and turning them both on.



Characters don't so much have sex with each other as they have sex on each other.

And after all that, the dirty parts are covered up by a strategically placed sheet.

Naked lunch

So if the story stinks and the home improvement/decorating options are uninteresting and you really don't have any control over moaningful game elements and the sexytime is as unsettlingly unsexy as that scene in *Auto Focus* in which Greg Kinnear and Willlem Dafoe do bad things to themselves at the same time and—ugh, never mind, anyway—where's the appeal in this game? Is there any appeal?

Not really, though I kind of got a bassackwardly perverted sense of pleasure by turning my roommates into devoted nudists who did everything naked together and then supplying my own dialogue: "What a delightful meal Natasha!" "Why thank you! Would you clean up while I defecate?" "I'd rather stand naked in the bathroom and talk about stamp collecting with you as you defecate, if that's all right." Of course it is.

But that's about it. The bottom line is that *Singles* would be awful no matter what, but it compounds its awfulness by failing even to deliver what it promises. This putatively naughty game should come with fetid



Taking the concept of "plumber's crack" to the limit, our heroine nakedly repairs a television with a hammer. Hope those sparks don't burn.

clothing options, dungeon equipment, and the option to call up a friend or five to join our hero and heroine in their erotic adventures, but it doesn't. It's sterile, soulless, and ultimately a tease that doesn't come close to delivering.

What a typ ■ Robert Coffey

Verdict ★dick

Almost as sexy and entertaining as mashing a naked Barbie against a naked G.I. Joe. Almost.

Novologic DEVELOPER Novologic ESRB Multiplayer shooter ESRB Rating: T RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 1.2 GHz, 1.5GB install, 256MB RAM, 56K Internet connection

Pentium 4 2.4 GHz, 512MB RAM, broadband Internet connection MULTIPLAYER: Internet (2-150 players)

Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising

Battlefield Indonesia

The maps are huge, and the view distance is up to 1 kilometer.



Novologic's *Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising* has been promoted as a *Battlefield 1942*/Vietnam killer. The game's box even features a quote from a rival gaming magazine that reads, "Why I may never play *Battlefield 1942* again." So is *Joint Ops* better than the entire *Battlefield* series? Against the odds, in a lot of ways: Shyeah.

It's definitely bigger. The game supports up to 150 players at a time on maps that can span 50 square kilometers, which is 31 square miles for those of you who don't speak Canadian. Unless you're the type of person who has really advanced spatial visualization skills, it's hard to picture how big 50 square kilometers really is. It's huge. You could cram a couple of *EverQuest* expansions onto some of the maps.

Rumble in the jungle

The operations all take place in the jungles, villages, and small cities of modern-day

Indonesia. The "joint" part comes from the fact that one team is a coalition of UN forces from countries such as the United States, Germany, Russia, and Australia, plus a few token hangers-on from places like France. The various military units all have access to the same equipment—they differ only in uniform and funny accent. The other team is populated by heavily tattooed Indonesian separatists.

With its tropical Southeast Asian setting, wide variety of vehicles, class-based player structure, and focus on a capture-and-hold style gameplay, *Joint Ops* at first appears to be a rote *Battlefield Vietnam* knockoff. There are enough differences, however, to endow *Joint Ops* with its own unique character. Most noticeably, almost every design decision appears to have

Although transport choppers have seats, you can also just stand in them during flight.



been made in an effort to promote the use of team tactics. For instance, the vehicle selection is heavily weighted toward helicopters, trucks, and boats whose primary use is transporting squads of soldiers. There are no tanks or planes at all and no vehicles (other than one type of chopper) in which a single player can simultaneously drive and operate any of the mounted guns. A realistic, unforgiving

A sprawling urban map.



damage model and the often long, looong distances from respawn point back to the front combine to encourage movement in groups. A Rambo-style lone-wolf strategy generally guarantees that the game will be a long series of helicopter rides.

Friendly skies

Speaking of which, the helicopter flight model is much simpler than *Battlefield Vietnam*'s. Choppers are effortlessly stable in the air and can bounce off pretty much anything without sustaining damage, making them almost impossible to crash. While this removes some of the satisfaction of mastering the controls, it also means you can hop into any waiting chopper secure in the knowledge that it's not going to fly 20 yards, flip over, and drop into a rice paddy. This wise design choice makes it easier to trust your teammates.

Thanks largely to its gigantic maps, the game also manages to rehabilitate *Battlefield*'s mostly useless (and unused) medic class. In *Joint Ops*, medics are crucial to a team's success. Even this early in the game's life cycle, players have already realized this fact, and the medic is one of the most popular classes.

Rather than implement *Battlefield*'s free-for-all capture-and-hold game, in which every capture point is available at all times, *Joint Ops* utilizes something like *Unreal Tournament*'s onslaught model, where only a few capture points are available at any given moment. This again inspires teamwork, since it's generally clear where people need to go.



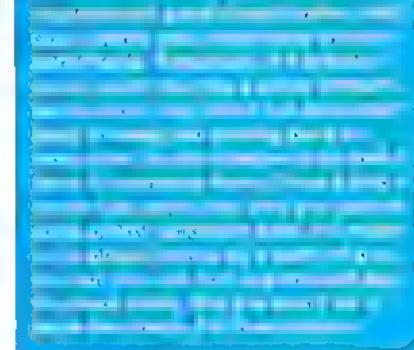
In theory, this focus on teamwork is a swell idea. In practice, Novologic may have been a little too optimistic about the amount of teamwork that's likely to spontaneously emerge in 150-person Internet pickup games. An enjoyable round of *Joint Ops* is often dependent on how willing the players are to work together. The *Battlefields* are a lot more fault-prone in the face of massive disorganization. When it all comes together, though, *Joint Ops* is a great game that offers a solid combat experience on a scale far beyond anything in the *Battlefield* series. And really, it's hard to blame the developers just because a lot of people are morons. Still, maybe they can fix that in the sequel. —Erik Wolpaw

Verdict

★★★★★
If you get lucky, it's better than *Battlefield*.



Playing Alone



When it all comes together, *Joint Ops* is a great game that offers a solid combat experience on a scale far beyond anything in the *Battlefield* series.

 PURE SHOOTER Kuma Reality Games DEVELOPER: Kuma Reality Games LTRE, FPS LSME RATING: None REQUIRED: Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB Videocard, broadband Internet connection, 750MB install RECOMMENDED: Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM MULTIPLAYER: Internet, GameSpy Arcade

Kuma\War

No\thank\you

Kuwa\War is a first-person shooter that is available for free download but requires a \$9.99 monthly subscription after the seven-day trial period expires. For your subscription, you get access to new content in the form of downloadable missions. All of these missions are based on real-world situations from Iraq and Afghanistan, and each one is prefaced by a video background briefing that does a nice job of setting the stage and makes you eager to jump in and play. Which is where the problems start.

What *Kuma|War* demonstrates is simply what hex-based war gamers have known for years: Just because something is historically and technically accurate doesn't mean it's fun. Actually, I'm kidding—while this statement is true, *Kuma|War* doesn't prove it, because the game isn't a good simulation, either.

The graphics engine has a lot of problems, from simply looking bad to not being able to detect collisions well. Dead bodies are routinely clipped by walls, and you often get hung up on corners, debris,



• Stryker combat vehicles have been added.



¶ Terrorists are easy kills thanks to bad A.I.

or other soldiers. The A.I. is awful, with enemies taking potshots at you one second, then going back to guarding the door they are covering while you walk in another door 10 feet away and shoot them. At other times, they just madly chase you until you kill them. Friendly A.I. is just as bad. Your squadmates are often unable to navigate narrow hallways due to the aforementioned obstacles, or even to follow you without repeated instructions to do so. The ability to jump between controllable squad members shouldn't be a substitute for friendly A.I.

The fact that the missions are based on real-life intelligence doesn't mean that they are particularly interesting: In fact, they offer

no tactical problems to solve other than picking off stationary enemies who seem to exist simply to give you something to shoot at. If actual terrorists behaved like this, the war in Iraq would be over tomorrow.

No matter how interesting the real-life situation is, the game manages to make it more boring than missions in most budget shooters. As the missions are all crippled by the numerous problems mentioned above, why pay for more of them each month? It's a great concept that needs a ton of design work. **Bruce Garyk**

Verdict

Good concert, lonely game.

Shrek 2

Nine-year-old Julian O'Neal talks about *Shrek 2*.

A close-up photograph of a brown donkey's face. The donkey has a dark brown coat with a lighter patch on its forehead. It is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is dark and out of focus, suggesting a natural outdoor setting.

Verdict: ********

1 PUBLISHER Activision DEVELOPER Luxoflux GENRE Action ESRB RATING M REQUIRED: Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM, 3.3GB install, 32MB videocard
RECOMMENDED Pentium 4 1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, broadband Internet connection MULTİPLAYER LOCAL, INTERNET, LAN (2-4 players)

True Crime: Streets of L.A.

Beverly Hills schlock

Calling *True Crime: Streets of L.A.* a tarted-up PlayStation 2 game is an insult to tarts. At least your average run-of-the-mill strumpet puts on some makeup and a push-up bra and tries to look good. The PC port of *True Crime* just rolls out of bed, finger-combs its hair, and ambles on over to the PC shelf. It doesn't help much that the original PS2/Xbox/GameCube release was a grating goulash of action-movie clichés, wooden dialogue, lame plotting, and game concepts we've seen done better many times.

Grand theft concept

Most reviews of the console version of *True Crime* trotted out *Grand Theft Auto* as the most obvious victim of developer Luxoflux's game-design carjacking, but its structure is actually closer to the far-superior *Mafia*. Both *True Crime* and *Mafia* offer detailed cityscapes that can be freely navigated in driving sequences, a character-driven plot advanced by driving to specific places and completing various goals, and a greater sense of interactive cinema than *GTA*. But where *Mafia* at least aspired to the style and elegance of Francis Ford Coppola, *True Crime* hovers somewhere around the *Police Academy* level, albeit lacking the grace and gravitas of Steve Guttenberg.

The plot and dialogue are just about the most unintentionally hilarious riff on the "loose cannon cop who gets things done" wheeze ever. Every single situation, line of dialogue, and character has been done to death. Most striking is the way these lines have been placed in the mouths of real actors such as Christopher Walken (sounding like a bad Christopher Walken Impersonator), Gary Oldman, Michael Madsen, Ron Perlman, and other familiar faces. Rather than ennobling bad dialogue, the presence of good actors merely emphasizes its flaws. Weighing even more heavily on the game is the obnoxious lead character, Nick Kang, who mistakes arrogant rudeness for self-assured cockiness.

Alternating driving and fighting segments allow you to explore the city at will in between missions, answering police radio calls. The crimes you respond to are interesting but quickly begin to repeat. Points, which affect your good/bad cop standing and unlock skill upgrades, are awarded for apprehending a criminal and deducted for killing either criminals or



Driving sequences could have been a high point of the game. Instead, the lack of external controller support stops the game cold, since the mouse and keyboard are simply ineffective for driving the car.

A bad action movie is usually over in 90 minutes, but *True Crime* goes on longer than *The Sorrow and the Pity*.

civilians. This is done in a rather peculiar, capricious way, since apprehending a hot-rodder by firing several dozen shots into his car is considered A-OK by your superiors, as is the occasional kneecapping and vehicular assault.

Road worrier

The heaviest rock around *True Crime*'s neck, however, is control. The utter lack of external controller support is a well-nigh-insurmountable flaw. It's mouse and keyboard or nothing, and the touchy driving sequences are simply untenable without a gamepad or joystick. Combat controls fare a little better. Using either autoaim or the optional mouse aiming for shooting is fairly easy, and the pretty satisfying hand-to-hand combat mode is probably *True Crime*'s strongest game-play element.

Graphically, the game doesn't quite measure up, since it looks like, well, a badly ported PS2 game with washed-out colors, graphical glitches, and only



The hand-to-hand combat sequences work fairly well, though the camera sometimes takes a vacation and leaves your perspective buried somewhere in the wall.

average textures and modeling. This, along with the appallingly bad driving sequences, horrible characters, plentiful clichés, and cringe-inducing dialogue, proves that unlike *Splinter Cell*, not all console/PC marriages are made in heaven. **Thomas L. McDonald**

Verdict

★☆☆☆
A cop-movie-cliché compendium with rotten controls.

Perimeter

Less than meets the eyes

Perimeter, the latest RTS from Codemasters, promised to be the next generation in the genre. In addition to the latest 3D graphics, it has an innovative combat system with transforming units and real-time terraforming. And though *Perimeter* delivers on all of these fronts, the final product so lacks coherence and fun that all the innovations are wasted.

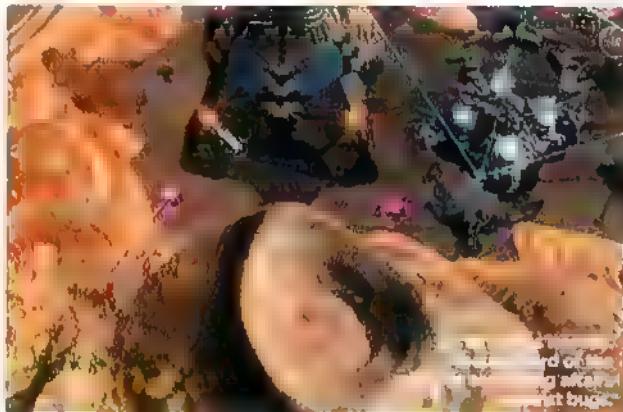
There is only one resource to manage, and it isn't harvested. Instead, you build energy generators—the more you build, the more you have. These generators can also be used to form a "perimeter" that makes your base invincible to attack. The limiting factor is time and terrain. You have five worker units that can either be used as builders or terraformers. The terraformers can transform any part of the map into flat terrain on which you can build. Because of this, much of the fighting becomes positional warfare over these valuable plots of flat land instead of mines, as in other games. It would have been nice if the terrain had been used for more than buildings, but since your units

can all fly or hover, it doesn't really play a part in combat.

In place of the mobs in other games, you build basic units that can then be transformed into more powerful units, including armor, artillery, and aircraft. The units

and aircraft. The units are interesting but require too much micro-management. Upgrades to your squads don't automatically create new units. Instead, you have to order each transformation individually. You're also limited to only 250 basic units, which means you can have very few of the more advanced units. The lack of offensive units, reliance on terraformed ground, and abundance of defensive weapons slow the game's pace severely, making you feel like you're fighting a futuristic version of World War I.

The 3D terrain and units are pretty, but the requirements are ridiculous: 3GB of disc space, a 64MB 3D card, and a DVD drive.



100

Even if you meet the requirements, the game will probably run slowly on some missions unless you're willing to lower the graphical detail.

The developers get credit for trying something new, but the slow gameplay, some dull missions, nonsensical story, and annoying micromanagement make *Perimeter* unenjoyable. Maybe there's something to be said for the tried and true. **Di Luo**

Verdict

The developers tried hard, but the final product just isn't fun.

Revisionist History

New in old series

America's Army: Special Forces

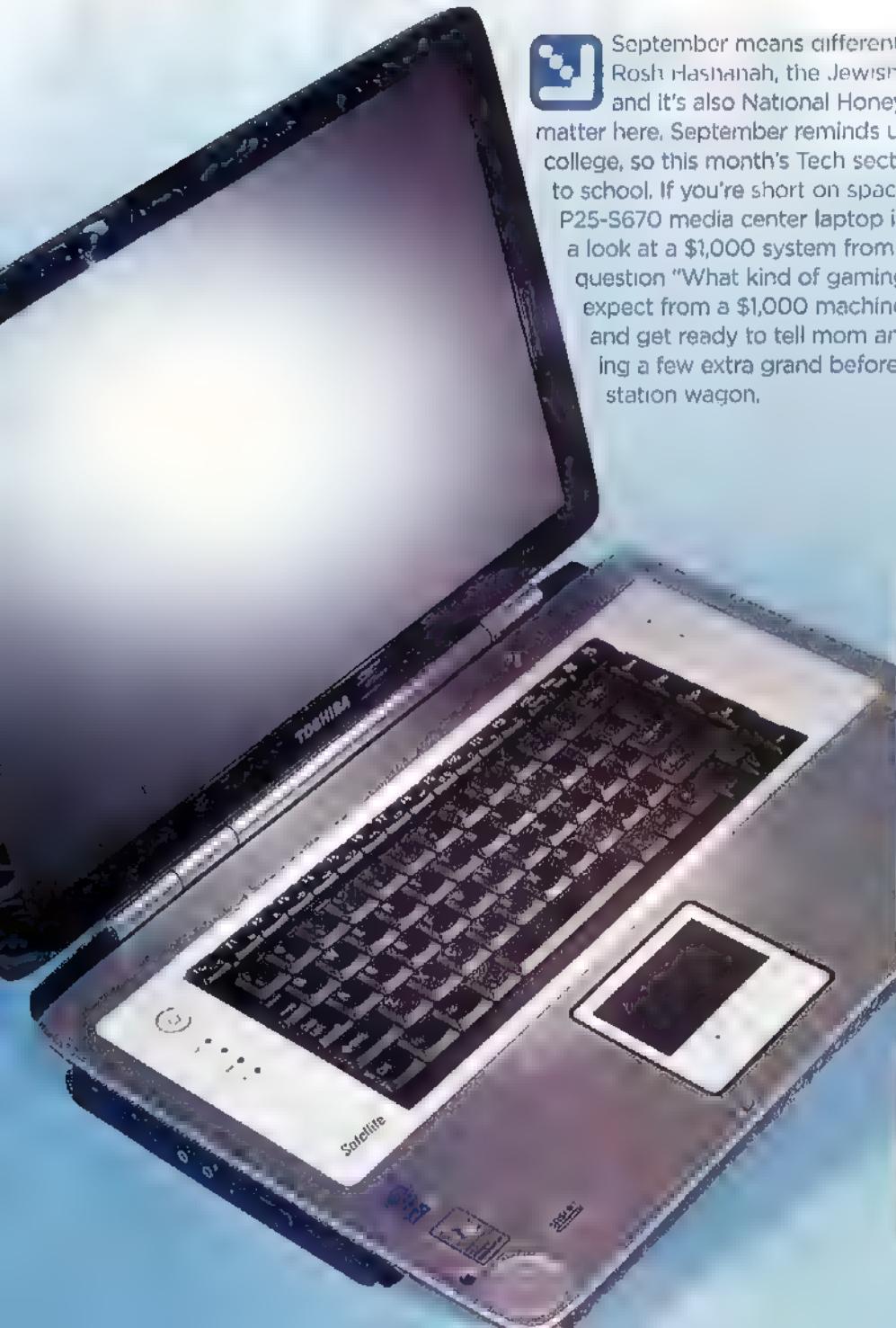
the Karma rag-doll character (2013) as in 'decals', lens-flare sun effects & actually introduces another





BACK TO SCHOOL

Forget about books and pencils—for gamers, going back to school means new toys



September means different things to different people. Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, is in September, and it's also National Honey Month. But that doesn't matter here. September reminds us of the joys of going to college, so this month's Tech section is all about going back to school. If you're short on space, then Toshiba's Satellite P25-S670 media center laptop is a no-brainer. We also take a look at a \$1,000 system from iBuyPower and answer the question "What kind of gaming experience can you expect from a \$1,000 machine?" So sit back, take notes, and get ready to tell mom and dad that you'll be needing a few extra grand before you head out in the family station wagon.

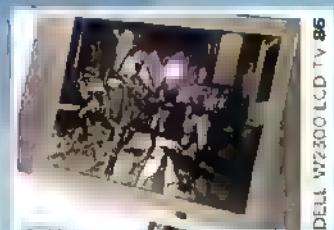
Inside



DELL INSPIRON XPS 8300



BACK TO SCHOOL: PC 87



DELL W2300 LCD TV 86

ZILLION FX

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MANUFACTURER: Toshiba PRICE: \$2,599

THE ULTIMATE SWISS ARMY KNIFE

Toshiba's latest Satellite is the perfect digital companion for the space conscious



Here's the dilemma: You're gonna spend the next couple of years in a cramped dorm room with another sweaty man. While this is the stuff that Jeff Green fantasizes about, the fact remains that space will be at a premium. You want to bring your homebrew gaming rig, television, TiVo, DVD player, and stereo system, but you don't have the space. That's where

Toshiba's Satellite P25-S670 media center "laptop" comes in. This thing is the ultimate Swiss Army knife.

This machine is so chock-full of features, we're at a loss as to where to begin. As a gaming rig, the 128MB GeForce FX 5700 Go graphics card is powerful enough to handle damn near any game. We benchmarked it at 1024x768 with AA turned off and found that this baby is more than capable. Its 3DMark2003 (v.340) score of 2,992 is less than the 3,356 that the ATI Mobility Radeon 9700 Pro-equipped Dell Inspiron XPS scored, but this is certainly nothing to shake a stick at. That said, its 3DGameGauge 3.5 score of 50fps shows that this machine is no slouch when it comes to actual gameplay.

Of course, games tell only part of this machine's story. The Satellite P25-S670 is, at its heart, a media center PC, and this is where the machine shines. The P25-S670 comes with a TV-tuner module that fits into one of the drive bays, which enables you to connect the laptop to either your satellite source or cable connection. I connected mine to my cable and recorded several *Chappelle's Show* episodes (TiVo-style), as well as a few Giants



games. Windows Media Center works like other DVR devices. You configure Media Center for your particular broadcast situation and it goes online and downloads a program guide. Recording shows is then as simple as right-clicking on a show in the guide and choosing "record."

While not terribly loud, the built-in Harman Kardon speakers do a good job. And that 17-inch screen was made for DVD playback. In a dorm or small apartment environment, the P25-S670 may be the only DVD player you'll need. And that enormous 80GB hard drive should be big enough to hold all of your digital music. Of course, you may want to connect some beefier speakers to it.

When it comes down to it, \$2,599 is a lot of money. But when you consider that it's all for a PC, DVD player and TiVo, it's not bad. Anyone who picks up the P25-S670 will no doubt fall in love with it. Accolades aside, Alienware, Voodoo, and Dell are the outfits that currently offer graphics card upgrades for laptops, so whether or not the P25-S670 will be able to handle upcoming titles like *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* remains to be seen. **W**illiam O'Neal

Games tell only part of this machine's story. The Satellite P25-S670 is, at its heart, a media center PC, and this is where the machine shines.

MANUFACTURER: DELL PRICE: \$3,329

DELL'S PORTABLE GAMING WORKHORSE

Dell's updated Inspiron XPS is big, heavy, and fast as hell



While Toshiba's Satellite P25-8670 is a jack-of-all-trades, Dell's Inspiron XPS is a master of one: gaming. Dell has crammed every high-end component imaginable into this behemoth, including an Intel 3.4GHz Pentium 4 CPU, 1GB of memory, a 60GB hard drive, a DVD multidrive, and ATI's 128MB Mobility Radeon 9700 graphics card.

tested the Inspiron XPS at 1024x768 without AA and our performance tests confirmed one thing—this laptop flies. Its 3DMark2003 (v.340) score of 3,356 at 1024x768 is more than 300 points faster than the 2,992 that the Toshiba achieved. Likewise, its 3DGameGauge 3.5 score of 57fps shows that this machine is more than capable for gaming. Hell, it even achieved relatively playable *Halo* and *Splinter Cell* framerates of more than 30fps.

The Inspiron XPS isn't perfect. Many of the criticisms Loyd Case made when he reviewed the first XPS back in April are still true. The machine weighs in at more than 10 pounds, and it gets plenty hot. Furthermore, while the speakers do get loud (by laptop standards), the Harman Kardon in the Toshiba sound better.

Similar to Alienware and Voodoo, Dell offers graphics card upgrades on this mobile unit. That feature, while rare, is an enormous bonus. Because this laptop has so much raw power, the ability to upgrade that Mobility Radeon when new parts become available means this machine has a much longer life span than past laptops. Hell, we even saw an Inspiron XPS running a 256MB version of ATI's X800 desktop processor.

If it's speed and upgradeability you need in your laptop, your choice is simple—you can't go wrong with Dell's Inspiron XPS. Thankfully, it also ships with a pretty comfortable backpack that'll save you on those long hauls. **William O'Neal**

SCORE: ★★★★½

MANUFACTURER: Gateway PRICE: \$2,225

THE ULTIMATE SIDEKICK

Gateway's 200ARC is the perfect educational companion



Critics will no doubt lambaste me for including a laptop with Intel Extreme Graphics in the hardware section of a computer-gaming magazine. The fact remains, however, that most "hardcore" PC gamers have more than one machine, so I see no reason why one of those machines shouldn't be an ultraportable laptop.

For students, an ultraportable machine is a no-brainer, and Gateway's 200ARC is awesome. Whether you're doing research in the library or writing a paper on the lawn, the 200ARC's light weight means that you won't have to spend any time in the health center getting V-codin for that sore back. In addition to its low weight (a little more than four pounds to be exact), we liked the built-in 802.11b/g support, which was supereasy to connect to a wireless network. Furthermore, the fact that the DVD-R/-RW/CD-RW drive is built in means you can easily burn and rip CDs or watch DVDs wherever you happen to be. And that 60GB hard drive means you won't run out of storage space anytime soon.

On the downside, we expected the 200ARC to have a longer battery life—we never got more than two hours out of our test unit. Fortunately, the power brick is light enough that flogging it around isn't a hassle. **William O'Neal**

SCORE: ★★★★½



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PHAT PANEL

Dell's dual-purpose LCD TV has us sprung



Putting a juicy 23-inch widescreen display right up in your grill will no doubt get your attention. Sexiness aside, however, Dell's W2300 LCD TV begs a couple of questions: Do you have enough room on your desktop, and is it worth all that money? The answers to those questions are "hopefully" and "that depends."

In addition to DVI and VGA inputs, it has a host of component, S-Video, and composite video inputs, as well as a cable tuner. But since this LCD panel serves double duty as an HDTV, it doesn't stand up to higher resolutions and higher refresh rates, so in-game performance was a concern. So what if it can show off Xbox games in 480p, 720p, and 1080? We wanted to know if it could handle those marathon *Far Cry* sessions.

It worked quite well, actually, running a DVI connection between the W2300 and an Nvidia GeForce FX 5600 Ultra graphics card at a bright, clear 450 nits. So



long as you can live with the widescreen gaming (1280x768 maximum resolution), this monitor won't let you down. Things looked a little fuzzy was during the initial setup, but a quick trip to Microsoft's ClearType tuner online calibration tool cleared things up in a flash. Any tweaks you want to make—whether in TV or PC mode—are easy to do through the user-friendly remote or the intelligently labeled buttons on the front panel. We didn't run into the ghosting often found in older monitors after base calibration.

The 20-watt speakers affixed to each side aren't a total embarrassment. Usually, audio is tacked on as an afterthought. Here, the W2300 actually has crisp mid sounds and crunkeworthy bass. The only thing missing is a headphone jack.

But do you really need all this? If you crave a big-ass monitor, don't have an HD set, or just want to sneak in a few rounds of *Chronicles of Riddick* on Xbox between downloads, we say go for it. And technically, the option to play Picture-on-Picture is there if you want it.

The pleasant surprise is that considering what you're getting, this display is a pretty good deal that delivers great performance without the premium price. Similar-sized, similar-performing hybrids are popping up in all sorts of places. The ever-so-stylish Sony panels do a passable job, and their competing 23-inch model sells for as much as \$2,300 in stores. **—**Daren Gladstone

Since this LCD panel serves double duty as an HDTV, it doesn't stand up to higher resolutions and higher refresh rates, so in-game performance was a concern.



SCORE: **86** Excellent

GAMING ON A BUDGET

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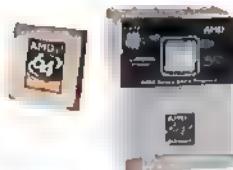
Asking iBuyPower to build a sub-\$1,000 machine meant that corners had to be cut somewhere.

BY WILLIAM O'NEAL If the midrange PC roundup I did in June was an exercise in compromise, then asking iBuyPower to put together a machine for less than \$1,000 takes the cake. The thing is, not everyone has thousands of dollars to spend on a gaming rig—especially if you're a student on a budget. With that in mind, I told the guys at iBuyPower to put together a complete system—tower, monitor, and speakers—for less than \$1,000, mostly because I wanted to see what I'd get. The results were interesting. It should come as no surprise that iBuyPower's Back to School machine wasn't the fastest machine around. It arrived with a 1.3GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor, 812MB of PC-3200 DDR400, an 80GB hard drive, 2.1 speakers, a 19-inch monitor, and Nvidia's sweetly underpowered 256MB GeForce FX 5700LE. Because my monitor was a freeware gift from the company's decision to go with that graphics card, I'll leave the monitor's selection to another page.

I tested it with a series of games, with AA and AF turned off, and at 1024x768. Games were definitely playable, but the Biggest Dog: Halo clocked out only 21 frames per second at that resolution. The thing is, asking iBuyPower to build a sub-\$1,000 machine meant the corners had to be cut somewhere. Just think that sacrificing graphics power was a mistake. Of course, since iBuyPower is a build-to-order outfit, you can easily make changes. For instance, to go with the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor and use that extra money to get a 128MB ATI Radeon 9600 XT graphics card, I'd also swap out the DVD+/-RW combo drive for either a DVD+/-R/RW or a CD-RW drive.

Given the constraints that I placed on iBuyPower, put together a solid machine that's still a solid backbone for an even better gaming rig. A more robust graphics card will no doubt improve this machine's gaming performance, and with a less powerful CPU, you may still manage to squeak in beneath the \$1,000 limit. **—William O'Neal**

SCORE: ★★★★



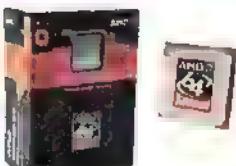
**AMD Socket 939 Athlon™
64 3800 FX-53**
1MB L2 Cache
64 Bit Processor
Model # ADAFX53ASBOX

\$811.00



AMD Athlon™ 64 FX-53
1MB L2 Cache
64 Bit Processor
Model # ADAFX53BOX

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AMD 939 Athlon™ 64 3800+
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Model # ADA3800AWBOX

\$715.00



AMD 939 Athlon™ 64 3500+
512KB L2 Cache 64 Bit Processor
Model # ADA3500AWBOX

\$499.00



AMD Opteron™ 250
1MB L2 Cache 64 Bit Processor
Model # OSA250BOX

\$845.00

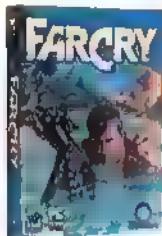


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PC Game



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PC Game



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**Unreal Tournament
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PC Game



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PC Game



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Battlefield Vietnam

Monitor



\$427.00

**Samsung 17 inch black LCD
600:1 Contrast ratio**

Case



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LanFire ATX-MidTower/420wt/PS**

Fan & Cooler



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\$18.99

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Opteron and Athlon Certified**

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CGW's resident gadget geek points out four top-notch gadgets that'll enhance anyone's collegiate experience



■ www.creative.com PRICE \$400

← NOMAD JUKEBOX ZEN XTRA

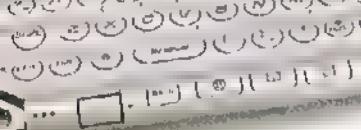
Don't get suckered into buying an iPod—it can't read half the file types the Zen Xtra (namely WMA) can. So what are you gonna do with the 60GB of space? Store your whole music collection and your buddy's in a flash, thanks to the USB 2.0 hookup. Then stash your homework and term papers with all the room left over.



www.jenystyle.com PRICE \$500

SONY CUE UX50

Notebooks are great, but even the thinnest and lightest ones are a pain in the ass to lug around campus. Ask Darren, the resident gadget dork—he swears by this one. It's got a sidekick-sized keyboard that can type up documents built-in Wi-Fi for Web surfing in class, and a friggin' sweet design.

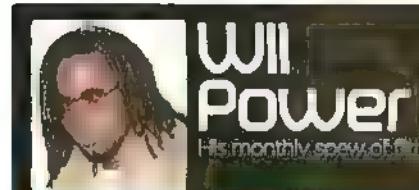


www.kanlcamlinolta.us

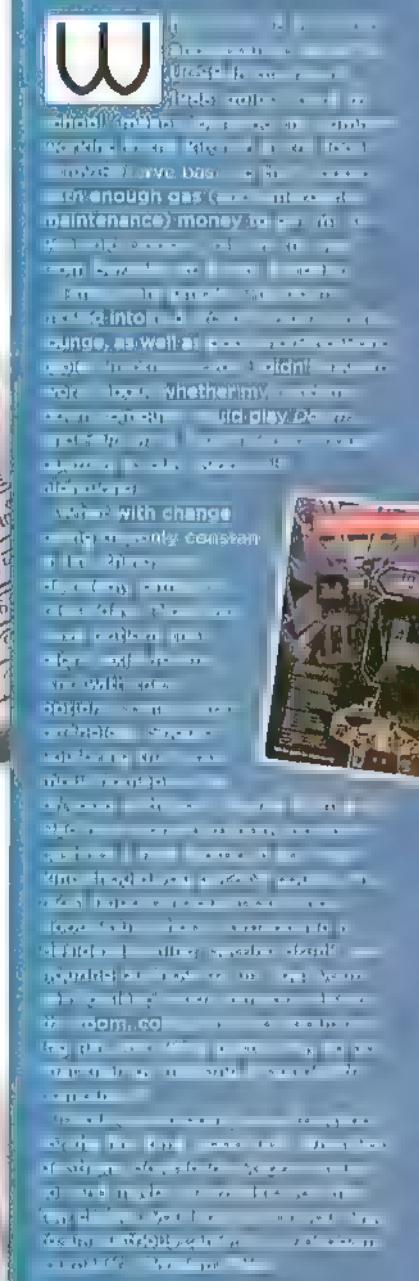
\$400 (\$240 on Amazon)

MINOLTA DIMAGE XG →

We figure you'll want a good quality picture from a dedicated digicam that you can shove in your pocket. This guy is tiny, takes quality 3.2 megapixel pictures in a flash, and has a stylin' case that's water resistant.  **Daren Gladstone**



Where's Rodney Dangerfield when you need him?



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K8S755A01-FRSG



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- Supports up to 8 USB ports
- ATX form factor
- Comprehensive software stack including Symantec's Norton Internet Security 2004

- Supports AMD™ Athlon™ 64, Socket 754 processors
- SiS755 + 964
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- 1 x AGP 8X, 5 x PCI
- 4 x SATA/150 (w/ RAID), 2 x ATA/133
- Integrated 6-channel audio
- Integrated Gigabit Ethernet 10/100/1000 controller (Realtek)
- Integrated IEEE-1394 (VIA, rear + front header)
- Supports up to 8 USB ports
- ATX form factor
- Comprehensive software stack including Symantec's Norton Internet Security 2004

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Lloyd's Cracked Case

School daze

The end of summer used to mean a return to the hallowed halls of academia, and tasks such as finding the right binders, pencils, books, a place to live, and clothes took precedence. These days, though, "back to school" often means, at its best, a brand-new PC—or if that's not an option, at least some new upgrades for that old beater of yours. Of course, the PC landscape is now more complex than ever. Between Nvidia and ATI and Intel and AMD, there are more questions than answers. That said, whether you're a parent looking to send the kids off with a technological advantage or a student who wants to be the hardware god of the dorms, this little primer can make this fall's PC shopping a bit more comprehensible.

All aboard the PCI Express!

The biggest deal this year has got to be PCI Express, a new type of expansion card connection that will eventually replace the aging PCI bus. Where standard (or "conventional") PCI's maximum throughput was about 133MB/sec-ond—not really good enough in today's world of gigabit Ethernet, 7.1 audio, and HDTV tuner cards—PCI Express connections will boast roughly 2.5 gigabits per second of throughput.

PCI Express will also replace AGP as a graphics-card interconnect. While PCI Express connections can be designed to be single lane, which offers roughly 2.5 gigabits per second of throughput, graphics cards will be using a 16-lane PCI Express connection, which can deliver around four gigabytes per second. Of course, the graphics hardware will have to understand PCI Express, so if a graphics chip was originally built for AGP, then a PCI Express card will have a bridge chip to enable the graphics chip to work over PCI Express. Thankfully, native PCI Express GPUs are also available from both ATI and Nvidia.

Socket to me

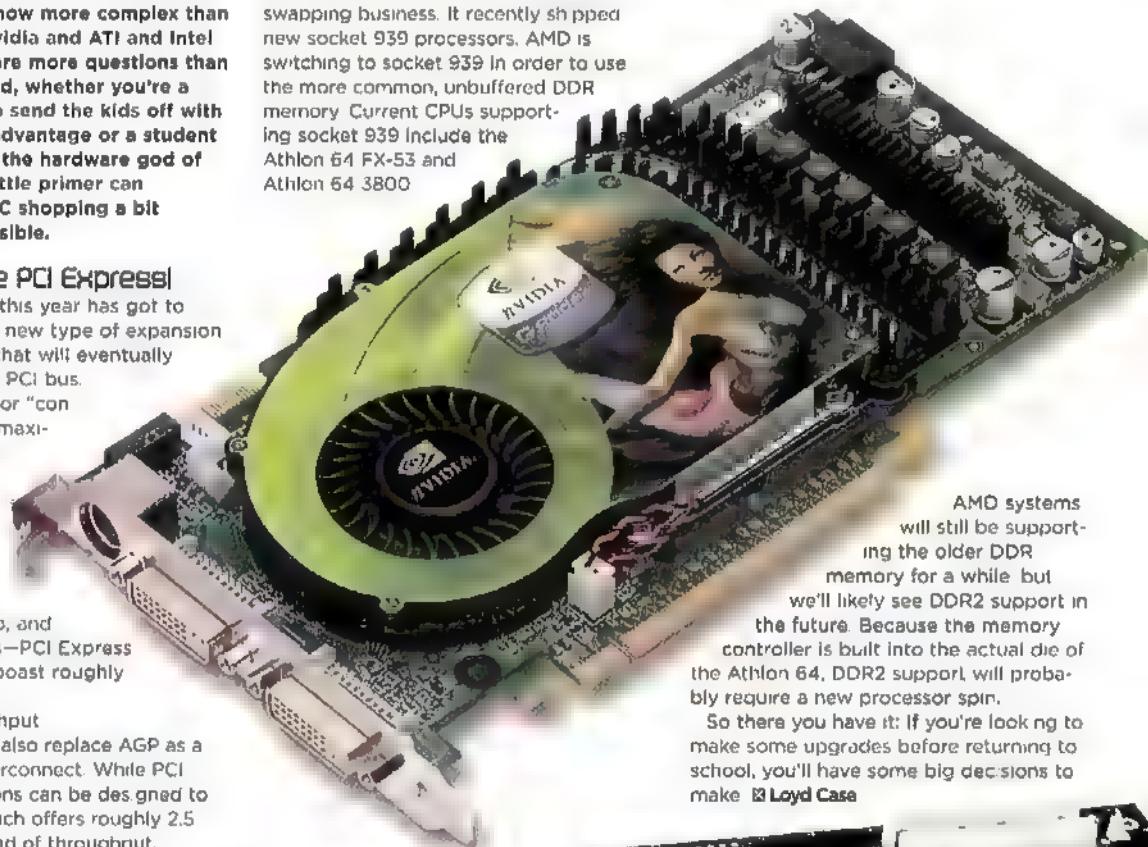
The first systems using PCI Express will be based on Intel chipsets that will incorporate a new socket for the Pentium 4 line

of CPUs. Where "old" processors had the pins on the CPU (and you would slide the CPU into the socket), Socket T turns this upside down. The pins are in the socket and the chip has tiny pads. Currently, Intel is shipping P4s up to 3.6GHz in the new socket format, including the expensive Pentium 4 Extreme Edition (which tops out at 3.4GHz).

AMD is not immune to this socket-swapping business. It recently shipped new socket 939 processors. AMD is switching to socket 939 in order to use the more common, unbuffered DDR memory. Current CPUs supporting socket 939 include the Athlon 64 FX-53 and Athlon 64 3800.

Memory lane

With the advent of the new Intel chipsets comes a new type of memory, DDR2. DDR2 will be shipping in two flavors, DDR2/400 and DDR2/533. The 533 version is faster, clocking in at 266MHz. If you're planning on acquiring a system for games or video editing, you owe it to yourself to spend a bit more for DDR2/533.



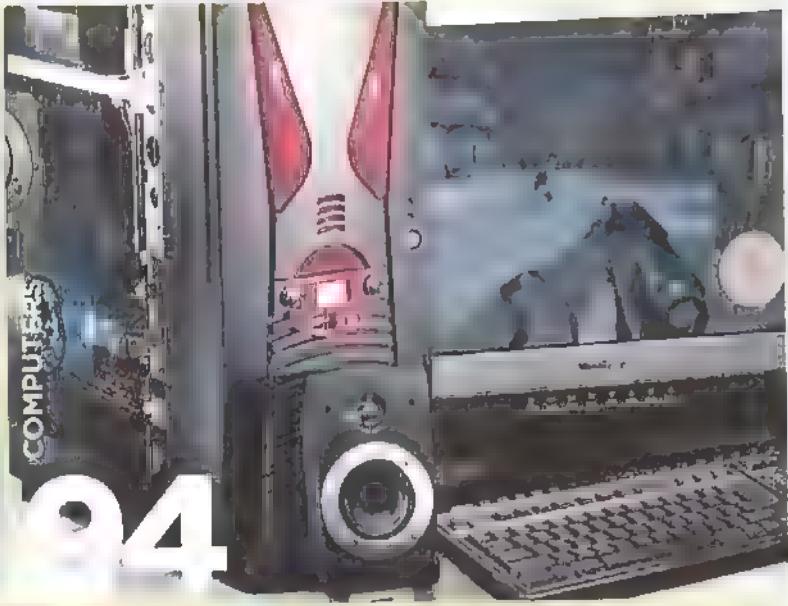
AMD systems will still be supporting the older DDR memory for a while but we'll likely see DDR2 support in the future. Because the memory controller is built into the actual die of the Athlon 64, DDR2 support will probably require a new processor spin.

So there you have it: If you're looking to make some upgrades before returning to school, you'll have some big decisions to make. **Lloyd Case**

The biggest deal this year has got to be PCI Express: a new type of expansion card connection that will eventually replace the aging PCI bus.



Check Out



Inside

Well kids, we've thought long and hard about it, and as of next issue, the Check Out section is going to have a new look and some fresh content. You can look forward to a more concise Rewind 100, the return of Killer Rigs, and an all-new monthly community page, along with whatever wacky stuff we manage to throw in. Yay

A-List

Our picks

While you know, when we first started the A-List, we imagined it as a replacement for Killer Rigs, since Will was getting sick and tired of running what essentially amounted to the same damn thing every month. So instead of Killer Rigs, we have A-List—which essentially amounts to the same damn thing every month. After this month, we're going to compromise: You'll be getting a condensed, rotating display of A-List goodies each month, as well as the frequently requested return of Killer Rigs for which Will allegedly has some "good ideas." So blame him if it sucks. Blaming Will is fun for everyone!



COMPUTERS

One day, there'll be computers the size of credit cards. Then you can play *Doom 3* while you're driving down the road, potentially setting ridiculous new precedents for videogame-related injury!

Intel-based system



PRODUCT

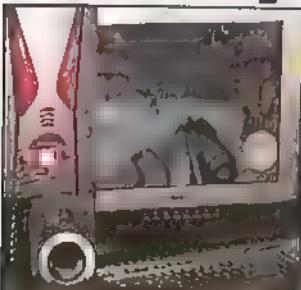
OUR PICK

■ **710G Gamer**
\$2,160
Gateway

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Gateway has found the sweet spot between being a major OEM and a boutique system maker. Its 710G Gamer uses the same parts the small guys use, and it is damn near as fast. This machine is so sweet, in fact, that it won last month's desktop roundup. While it isn't necessarily as "fast" as machines by Voodoo and Falcon, its 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card, combined with a bevy of awesome accessories has us sold.

AMD-based system



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

■ **Hexx c355**
\$2,500
VoodooPC

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While Gateway's 710G Gamer is like the Swiss Army knife of computers, VoodooPC's Hexx is an awesome balance of speed and style. AMD's Athlon 64 3000+ CPU, in combination with a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card and 1GB of Corsair memory, makes this rig plenty fast—but it's the Hexx's unique styling that really has us hooked. Who said PCs have to be ugly?

LAN-boy rig



EDITOR'S CHOICE

OUR PICK

- **FragBox Pro**
\$1,795
Falcon Northwest

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Dave Salvator doesn't like anything, which is why we were surprised that he wanted to give Falcon's FragBox Pro an Editors' Choice award. Of course, one look at the thing and you can see why it's so cool. Inside that little box lurks an Intel Pentium 4 2.80GHz CPU, a 120GB hard drive, 1GB of memory, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card. Not all small form-factor PCs can pack that kind of power, but Falcon worked some serious "cooling magic" to get all that to work together.

PERIPHERALS

Darren smashed at least one mouse into tiny pieces while he was playing *Unreal Tournament 2004* for review. Then he gave it five stars. Yeah, that Darren's a pretty weird guy.

Speakers



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

- **GigaWorks S750**
\$500
Creative Labs

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While some may scoff at a 7.1 speaker setup, who would turn down 700 watts of awesome audio power? With two rear and two side satellites, the S750 will turn your home sound setup into a movie theater.

MIDRANGE PICK

- **Z-5300**
\$200
Logitech

Logitech's Z-5300 system earned an Editors' Choice award in our February issue. This setup boasts incredible power, quality, and bass, all at a decent price. Take note, though—these speakers lack digital inputs.

BUDGET PICK

- **Z-3**
\$100
Logitech

If you're on a budget, we suggest you forgo a cheap set of 4.1 or 5.1 speakers and opt for a good set of 2.1 speakers instead. Logitech's Z-3s sound great and look even better.

Keyboard



PRODUCT

WIRED PICK

- **MultiMedia Keyboard**
\$30
Microsoft

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

You can't go wrong with this handy keyboard. The buttons at the top allow you to perform common functions like launching a Web browser, opening folders, and controlling multimedia apps such as Media Player.

WIRELESS PICK

- **Wireless Optical Desktop Elite**
\$100
Microsoft

Microsoft's latest desktop set sports the company's new tilt-wheel technology that allows you to scroll horizontally through documents. The keyboard is highly customizable, and its cushioned palm rest is more comfortable than a standard plastic one.

Gamepad



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

- **Dual Action USB**
\$20
Logitech

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Ever since we put the Dual Action USB in the A-List, we've received complaints about it. Hey, it may look like a PS2 DualShock controller, but the fact is, if you're playing sports games on a PC, this is the pad to use.



A-LIST PERIPHERALS

Mouse



PRODUCT

WIRED PICK

Intellimouse Explorer 4.0
\$50
Microsoft

WIRELESS PICK

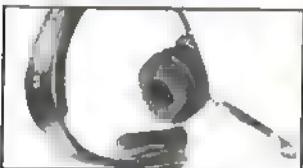
Intellimouse Explorer 2.0
\$60
Microsoft

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Microsoft's latest Intellimouse Explorer boasts the company's new tilt-wheel technology, but more important, it's very comfortable and rocks plenty of customizable buttons. It can also be connected to either a standard PS/2 port or a USB port.

Microsoft's Wireless Intellimouse Explorer 2.0 is essentially the wireless version of the Intellimouse Explorer 4.0. While it comes in several colors, we prefer the leather-bound version.

Headset



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

PC155
\$70
Sennheiser

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Not necessarily a radical change, the Sennheiser PC155 is more of an update to the company's PC150 headset that Darren Gladstone loves so much. That said, if you're playing any online games with voice support you'll like the PC155.

Joystick



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

Extreme 3D Pro
\$35
Logitech

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While they aren't as popular as they once were, there are still some pretty good flight sims out there. Whether you're a hardcore or casual flight-sim fan, Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro will help you get the job done.

Racing wheel



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

MOMO Racing Wheel
\$100
Logitech

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

The entry-level MOMO wheel is an awesome peripheral. What's not to love about feeling like you're actually behind the wheel? It's just the kind of thing that'll get your motor in gear for some *Need for Speed Underground*.



DISPLAYS

Most people don't realize that regular televisions don't have nearly the same resolution as a nice PC monitor. Just one of the advantages we have over the console crowd....

CRT monitor



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

22-inch MultiSync FE2211SB
\$600
NEC

BUDGET PICK

19-inch E90fb
\$225
ViewSonic

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

When it comes to gaming, CRTs can't be beat—and NEC's MultiSync has been the favorite of many of the boutique system builders for years. With a huge viewable area and a great price, this is definitely a recommended buy.

For gamers on a budget, ViewSonic's 19-inch E90fb is a fantastic CRT display. While 14-inch monitors used to be entry-level displays, there's no reason to go below 19 inches with prices like this.

LCD monitor



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

Dell UltraSharp 2001FP

\$1,000

Dell

BUDGET PICK

Hitachi CML175B

\$500

Hitachi

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Dell's UltraSharp 2001FP is often packaged with the company's XPS gaming system. With a slick design and a response time of 16ms, this display makes gaming a real treat. It also pivots 90 degrees for vertical document viewing.

Hitachi's update to last year's CML174B model, the CML175B boasts a native resolution of 1280x1024 (great for gaming) and a 16ms response time. In other words, a great gaming LCD just got more...uh...greater(er).

COMPONENTS

Back in the days of state-of-the-art 256-color graphics and silly MPC compatibility specs, a 1x CD-ROM drive cost upwards of \$1,000. Now you can get a speedy DVD+RW for less than \$100. Sheesh!

Processor



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

AMD Athlon 64 FX-53

\$800

AMD

BUDGET PICK

Intel Pentium 4 2.8GHz

\$200

Intel

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Among gaming processors, the Athlon 64 FX-53 is at the top of the heap. Even though the 64 bits aren't being exploited, the 32-bit applications run almost as fast as Darren can talk. We said almost.

While the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 chip is not as king of the road as an 800MHz frontside-bus 3.4GHz model, it is still one zippy little core. Plus, with an Intel mobo, you'll be ready for the eventual upgrade.

Motherboard



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

Asus SK8V

\$200

Asus

BUDGET PICK

Intel D875PBZ

\$150

Intel

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Designed for AMD's Athlon 64 FX line of processors, the SK8V sports the 64-bit chipset of choice—the VIA K8T800. This motherboard also boasts a 400MHz frontside bus, as well as support for DDR400 RAM.

Intel's D875PBZ isn't so much "low end" as it is flexible. Constructed around the I875P chipset, it has built-in SATA RAID support and makes a great backbone for an affordable Pentium 4 system.

Soundcard



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

Creative Labs Audigy 2 ZS

\$200

Creative Labs

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

You haven't experienced surround until you've heard an awesome 7.1 system. In conjunction with Creative's GigaWorks 5750 7.1 speakers, the Audigy 2 ZS is awesome. Serious audiophiles can upgrade to the Platinum or Platinum Pro models for even more power.

A-LIST COMPONETS

Videocard



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

256MB ATI Radeon X800 XT
\$500
ATI

MIDRANGE PICK

128MB Radeon 9600 XT
\$175
ATI

BUDGET PICK

256MB GeForce FX 5700LE
\$100
Nvidia

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

While the debate continues to rage about who's got the top card, the fact remains that these cards are more similar than dissimilar as far as performance goes. However, with Nvidia's crazy power requirements, ATI gets the nod this time.

ATI's midrange part is plenty fast enough to handle any game you're currently playing. Sure, it may not be as fancy as a 256MB 9800 XT card, but it's definitely easier on the wallet.

Don't expect to play your games at higher resolutions like 1600x1200. Nvidia's GeForce FX 5700LE is essentially just a way to get into the games. If you turn off effects like AA and AF, you'll be fine with this card.

Hard drive



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

Deskstar 7K250 250GB
\$250
Hitachi

BUDGET PICK

DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB
\$100
Maxtor

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

A single 250GB Hitachi Deskstar hard drive provides more than enough disk space for 99 percent of the world's population. If you're in that rare 1 percent that needs more, double them up for a monstrous RAID array.

At a little more than \$1 per GB, Maxtor's 7,200 rpm DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB drive is a great option for a single-drive rig.

Optical drive



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

DVR-A07U
\$200
Pioneer

BUDGET PICK

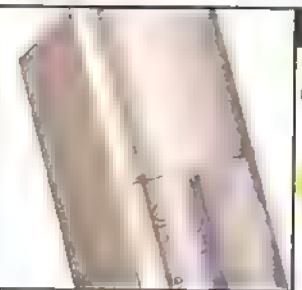
DDU1621 16x DVD-ROM
\$30
Sony

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

This drive is not for the faint of heart—or light of wallet. Pioneer's latest combo drive does everything you need: You can create your own DVD movies, burn music CDs, or just back up your data.

Judging by the responses to our first-ever DVD, many of you have yet to adopt this technology. At around \$30 for a basic 16x drive, there's no reason to wait—and Sony's 16x DVD-ROM is a great choice.

Case



PRODUCT

TOWER PICK

TAC-T01-E1C
\$150
Cooler Master

ALTERNATE-FORM PICK

SN85G4
\$300
Shuttle

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Cooler Master's TAC-T01 is big, heavy, and not necessarily cheap, but it's a great case for building that rig of your dreams. It's solid and shiny, and there's a metal monolith inset on the case's face. What is that thing for, anyway?

Shuttle's Nforce3 150-based setup is the perfect option for building an Athlon 64 FX-based shuttle box. The motherboard supports DDR400 and rocks Realtek's 6-channel audio. Plus, it's much more portable than a bulky tower.

MOBILITY

With blocky, 17-year-old games like *Final Fantasy 7* available for cell phones, who cares about stuff like *Palinkiller* and *City of Heroes*? Oh, that's right—the discerning public.

Laptop



PRODUCT

HIGH-END PICK

• **Satellite P25-S670 Media Center laptop**

\$2,599

Toshiba

BUDGET PICK

M6807

\$1,549 (after \$100 mail-in rebate)

eMachines

SLIM & LIGHT PICK

200ARC

\$1,225

Gateway

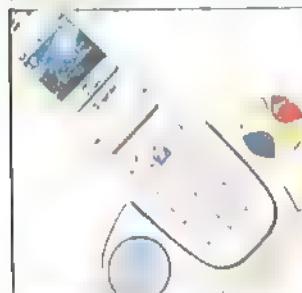
WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Toshiba's Satellite P25-S670 Media Center laptop is the ultimate jack-of-all-trades. Is it a TiVo? Yes. Is it a gaming laptop? Yes. Is it a DVD player? Yes. While it's not as fast as Dell's Inspiron XPS, the Satellite P25-S670 is just plain cool.

eMachines' M6807 ships with a 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics chip, but in many tests, it outperforms machines with 128MB graphics options. That said, at only \$1,549, you'll be damned happy with this Athlon 84-based laptop.

With its lightweight and built-in 802.11b/g wireless capabilities, we're in love with Gateway's 200ARC. Add the built-in DVD multi drive into the mix and this baby is the ultimate road warrior.

Phone



PRODUCT

FLIP PHONE PICK

GTi650

\$199 (\$49 with a two-year contract)

Samsung

NON-FLIP PHONE PICK

3660

\$200

Nokia

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Of the current crop of gaming-enabled phones, this one is the sickest. Most importantly of the bunch. With the addition of the \$39 PCS Game Pad (a GBA-like docking station), it's much easier to control the action.

Thanks to a new federal policy that allows you to keep your phone number when switching cell providers, negotiating and pinning down a really good deal on a phone is much easier. For a normal-sized phone, this model works great.

PDA



PRODUCT

PALM OS PICK

Zodiac 2

\$400

Tapwave

POCKETPC OS PICK

e805

\$540

Toshiba

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

For the moment, you aren't gonna find another PDA with this kind of juice for the price that Tapwave is asking. With it, you can bust out some grinds in *Tony Hawk*, juggle your contact manager (yay!), listen to music, and watch *The Simpsons*.

This PDA sits at the top of Toshiba's food chain. It's built especially for the power-hungry PocketPC user, and its bells and whistles far surpass the 400MHz processor and 128MB of free RAM. What better way to run MAME and countless games?

Gadget



PRODUCT

OUR PICK

DSC-T1 Cyber-shot

\$550

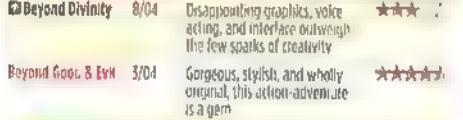
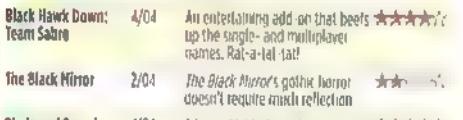
Sony

WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT

Holy crap! Your wallet is probably bigger than this 5-megapixel digital camera. Sony's DSC-T1 is tiny, but it has a large LCD screen and 3x optical zoom. Poor battery life is the only price you'll be paying for high style.

Rewind 100

What should you play today? Names in red indicate Editors' Choice games

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE	GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Across the Dnepr	4/04	An imbalanced, single-scenario Korean Packoff add-on. Dnepr worth the Dnepr.	★★★★★				
America's Army: Special Forces v2.0	3/04	Special Forces is the tactical-sim genre at its finest.	★★★★★				
Armed & Dangerous	3/04	A straight-laced shooter with great cut scenes.	★★★★★				
Battle Engine Aquila	4/04	Gorgeous and fun <i>Heretic War</i> style action, but not deep or groundbreaking.	★★★★★				
Battlefield Vietnam	6/04	Scarier, tougher, and prettier than <i>Battlefield 1942</i> .	★★★★★				
Beyond Divinity	8/04	Disappointing graphics, voice acting, and interface outweigh the few sparks of creativity.	★★★★★				
Beyond Good & Evil	3/04	Gorgeous, stylish, and wholly original, this action-adventure is a gem.	★★★★★				
Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	4/04	An entertaining add-on that beats the single- and multiplayer names. Rat-a-tat-tat!	★★★★★				
The Black Mirror	2/04	<i>The Black Mirror</i> 's gothic horror doesn't require much reflection.	★★★★★				
Blade and Sword	4/04	A lame <i>Blade</i> clone that might've been interesting four years ago.	★★★★★				
Breed	7/04	The Breed wants the planet? Let 'em have it.	★★★★★				
Broken Sword 3: The Sleeping Dragon	2/04	Dragon flameboyantly breaks out of the box but drags it around a little too much.	★★★★★				
Celebrity Deathmatch	2/04	Save your money by just throwing beer cans at the television.	★★★★★				
City of Heroes	8/04	Love it or hate it, <i>City of Heroes</i> is a must-play.	★★★★★				
Civ: Beyond Earth: Conquests	4/04	An incredibly refined new version of <i>Civ 3</i> with multiplayer that finally works.	★★★★★				
Combat Mission: Afrika Korps	4/04	<i>Combat Mission 2.1</i>	★★★★★				
Commandos 3	5/04	Maybe the toughest game ever, and not in a good way.	★★★★★				
Conflict: Desert Storm 2: Back to Baghdad	2/04	At times engaging, but not quite all it can be.	★★★★★				
Conspiracies	5/04	Cheesier than the riped Greek feta.	★★★★★				
Contract J.A.C.K.	2/04	No franchise shines forever—J.A.C.K. is the first blip on the <i>Wolf</i> series.	★★★★★				

Shooters

Our Favorite



Painkiller

★★★★★

This unassuming game slipped under the radar, then jumped up and kicked all our asses when we weren't looking—that's how good it is. Reviewer Tom Chick would've given it 27 stars if we'd let him.



Half-Life

★★★★★

What does Jeff Green think of *Half-Life*? When asked about it, he had this to say: "We gave it five stars! FIVE STARS!" Then he ran down the hall screaming something about aliens. Yeah, Jeff likes his *Half-Life*.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	3/04	This game was great when it was free. For \$40, it's just good	★★★★★
Crusader Kings	2/04	Big sweeping game, but too unwieldy even for seasoned players	★★★★★
Crystal Key 2: The Far Realm	8/04	A stunning example of why adventure games aren't as popular as they once were	★★★★★
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation—Dark Notives	8/04	Fun if you're already a fan—of boredom	★★★★★
Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	2/04	Great expansion for veteran players, but not much for new players	★★★★★
Dead Man's Hand	8/04	A five-card draw	★★★★★
Dead to Rights	2/04	This no-nonsense port of an aged, derivative, repetitive shooter was dead on arrival	★★★★★
Desert Rats vs. Afrika Corps	7/04	A good historical RTS, despite flawed infantry and some puzzelike maps	★★★★★
Deus Ex 2: Invisible War	3/04	The sequel to Deus Ex is both dumbed down and smarted up	★★★★★
Dinobots	2/04	The most gameplay of any 4X game available anywhere	★★★★★
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	2/04	Good stuff for fans of the original	★★★★★

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age	2/04	A solid entry into the burgeoning historical real-time-strategy subgenre	★★★★★
FIFA 2004	2/04	It might be a rough console port, but it's still the best soccer game on any platform	★★★★★
Far Cry	6/04	There's a good, maybe outstanding game lurking underneath all the illustration. Good luck getting at it	★★★★★
Final Fantasy XI	2/04	A rock-solid MMORPG from one of the most unlikely sources	★★★★★
Firestarter	6/04	It's better than Deer Hunter	★★★★★
Gangland	6/04	A lot of possibilities and potential, but the pot of unmanagable action makes it hard to enjoy	★★★★★
Gothic II	2/04	Better than the first, but still a little too wonky and foreign to be a classic	★★★★★
Hidden & Dangerous 2	2/04	A really good game hampered by the same pesky bugs and problematic A.I. as the original	★★★★★
Homeworld: Contracts	8/04	It's a flashback expansion pack that could have been more	★★★★★
Homeworld 2	12/03	It's no <i>Cataclysm</i> —it's not even <i>Homeworld</i>	★★★★★
Horizons: Empire of Iskaria	5/04	More of the same, with dragons	★★★★★
Jack the Ripper	5/04	A good Ripper story butchered by bugs, feeble puzzles, and a bad ending	★★★★★

Jeff's Picks

CGW staff faves

World of Warcraft

I know, I know. I should probably shut up about *World of Warcraft*

already. I'm trying—if for no other reason than to stop looking like Blizzard's bee-yotch—but this game has me totally hooked. Wanna buy some leather armor?



Splinter Cell

Pandora Tomorrow

The Clancy games have always been

too technofetishistic for me. I prefer games with fireballs! But I loved *Splinter Cell*, and the sequel is equally outstanding. Great level design, awesome graphics, and fun missions have made this my default single-player game this month.

Yahoo! Cribbage

What can I say?

Sometimes it's the little things

Besides, my ego demands that I beat morons online after enduring the constant humiliation of losing to my 10-year-old daughter when we play at home.



Half-Life 2

★★★★★

Larger levels, mission-based gameplay, tricky A.I., and kick-ass multiplayer all combined to make this one of the best FPS games of its time. Not to mention it looked and sounded pretty damn nice.



Wolfenstein 3D

N/A

Before *Half-Life*, before *Doom*, this game started it all—a 256-color romp through a weapon-filled, Nazi-infested castle. Maybe not the most complex plot in the world, but hey, who cares as long as we can shoot stuff?

Bad Box Art

Bad ideas gone worse



King's Quest 5
This game pioneered new cutting-edge technology such as VGA graphics and CD-ROM drives. It also had, in our opinion, one of the worst box covers in Sierra's history. What's up with that kid and his dog? We don't remember that being in the game.

**Virtual Resort: Spring Break**

A lot of the Tycoon-type games really deserve to be here, but none more than *Virtual Resort: Spring Break*. As crazy as it may sound, drawing a bunch of deformed 50-year-old Price is Right models on your box isn't the best way to catch the consumer's eye.

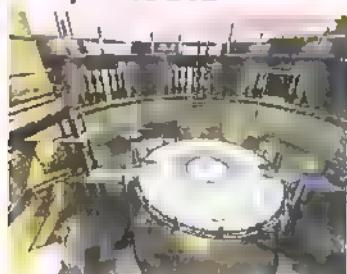
**Ripper**

When you sit down and think about it, Take-Two's freaky-deaky horror

adventure game had one ugly box. It's also just a pretty bad game in general, though it does feature the voice talent of Christopher Walken. Funny guy, that Christopher Walken.

Crapshots

Total

**Breed****★★★★★**

This game is so bad, they couldn't even release the developer's original version. Or maybe that's why it's so bad. We don't have a straight answer on that one. Either way, *Breed* is just plain garbage.

**Terminator 3: War of the Machines****★★★★★**

I AM AHNOLD, I WILL CRUSH AND DESTROY AND TERMINATE AND GOVERNATE! To put it in the words of one Wil O'Neal, who had to suffer through this atrocity, "This game sucks."

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	3/04	A five-star expansion sadly undone by bugs	★★★★★
Nosferatu	2/04	Well, at least it sounds spooky	★★★★★
Once Upon a Knight	2/04	A decent-enough RTS bogged down by a lame RPG and the most skeevy milk in history	★★★★★
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	4/04	If you're into third-person fighting games with tools, knock yourself out	★★★★★
Paintkiller	1/04	Do you who?	★★★★★
Patrician III	2/04	Still more than a glorified P.C. patch	★★★★★
Pax Romana	1/04	A decent primer for <i>Rome: Total War</i>	★★★★★
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2/04	A decent idea at its core, but not worth the price	★★★★★
Railroad Tycoon 3	2/04	You don't have to love trains to enjoy the historical and economic challenges here—but a little train love won't hurt	★★★★★
Rainbow Six 3: Athena Sword	6/04	There's no excuse for this game to have the same sorry bugs and lame A.I. that plagued the original	★★★★★
Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots	2/04	Almost perfect...and then it crashes	★★★★★

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos	4/04	A slimy add-on that's barely enough to satisfy the Shadowbane junkies	★★★½★
Silent Hill 3	3/04	In S.H. 3, the only things that go bump in the night are kooky monsters	★★★½★
Silent Storm	4/04	Like a gorgeous WWII mod to the revered <i>X-COM</i> . Highly recommended.	★★★★★



Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	6/04	A four-and-a-half-star game riddled with far too many critical bugs	★★★★½
Squad Assault: Western Front	3/04	Better than <i>G! Combat</i> , like anchovies are better than anchovies	★★★★★
Star Chamber	5/04	Original, fun, competitive, and free to try. What're you waiting for?	★★★★★
Star Fury	2/04	Open-ended and flexible without being too complex	★★★★½
Starsky & Hutch	1/04	The bad rep of the '70s continues with this crappy game from a crappy license	★★★½★
Syberia II	5/04	Visually stunning, but the pedestrian gameplay saps some of the fun	★★★★½
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	5/04	It's not as bad as you'd imagine—it's worse	★★★½★
Terminator 3: War of the Machines	4/04	Ugly and just plain terrible	★★★★½
The Hobbit	2/04	Standard console fare, lightly Tolkien-flavored	★★★★★
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	2/04	The best <i>64</i> top-off ever, and a must have for <i>Simpsons</i> fans	★★★★★
Title Bout: Championship Boxing	5/04	The undisputed heavyweight champion of boxing sims	★★★★★
Two Thrones	6/04	It gets an extra half point for the love price	★★★½★
Unreal Tournament 2004	6/04	Too busy shooting...must...write...review	★★★★★
Uru: Ages Beyond Myst	2/04	Some good puzzles, some bad action, no story, lots of familiar elements—maybe the eventual online content can make it more compelling	★★★★½

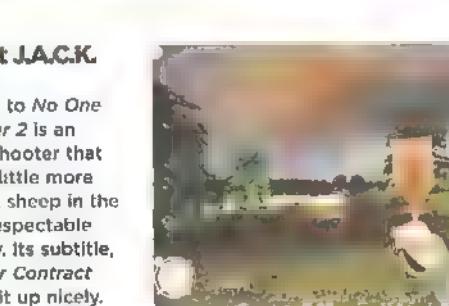
GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Vegas Tycoon	4/04	A colorful and entertaining casino builder that's got shovin' the jackpot	★★★★½
Victoria	3/04	Good game, bad bugs	★★★½★
War of the Ring	7/04	Good use of Middle-earth elements in a sadly mundane RTS	★★★★½



War Times	8/04	Like mayonnaise just starting to spoil, <i>War Times</i> is blandly bad	★★★½★
Warhammer 40,000: Fire Warriors	7/04	If you don't have the latest <i>Unreal</i> yet, play <i>War Times</i> or <i>Quake 4</i>	★★★½★



Warlords: Battlecry III	8/04	A whole lotta RTS goin' on—and some bugs	★★★★
Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc	5/04	Thought it has its moments, Joan lacks a certain <i>je ne sais quoi</i>	★★★★½
Worms 3D	5/04	Short doses of personality don't overcome the long bouts of frustration	★★★★½
X-2: The Threat	3/04	A much deeper yet less playable version of <i>Freelancer</i>	★★★★
XIII	2/04	This Belgian import waffles between fun and frustration, excitement and tedium	★★★★
You Don't Know Jack: The Lost Gold	5/04	Some treasures are best left buried	★★★★½
X-Plane 7.40	4/04	Let's would-be aircraft designers create a wild variety of flyable vehicles	★★★★½



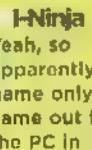
Ninjas Kick Ass

Ninjas flip out ALL the time!



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

The fans are divided on whether the new *Ninja Turtles* cartoons are any good. They're closer in tone to the original comics, so we like 'em. Unfortunately, the spin-off game is a tedious button-mashing snorefest. What kind of ninja mashes buttons? The turtle kind, apparently.



I-Ninja

Yeah, so apparently this game only came out for the PC in Europe. It's all about a crazy little ninja flipping out and killing robots with swords, rocket launchers, and guided missiles—you know, all the cool weapons that real ninjas use.



Shadow Warrior

What's with all these ninjas using guns? Don't these guys watch movies? This old 3D Realms game uses the *Duke Nukem* engine and follows the adventures of a broken English-speaking, gun-toting ninja assassin named Lo Wang.



Contract J.A.C.K.

This prequel to *No One Lives Forever 2* is an uninspired shooter that amounts to little more than a black sheep in the otherwise respectable *NOLF* family. Its subtitle, *Just Another Contract Killer*, sums it up nicely.



Gods and Generals

N/A

Based on the movie of the same name, this game (if you can call it that) is so god-awful, we didn't even dignify it with a review. If you're into budget-priced pieces of crap, you'd be hard-pressed to do worse.



DEVELOPER: Infinite Interactive GENRE: Multiplayer, FFS, ESRB RATING: T, RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 450, 120MB RAM, 2GB install

RECOMMENDED: Pentium III 600, 256MB RAM, MULTIPLAYER: LAN, Internet (2 players)

Warlords Battlecry III

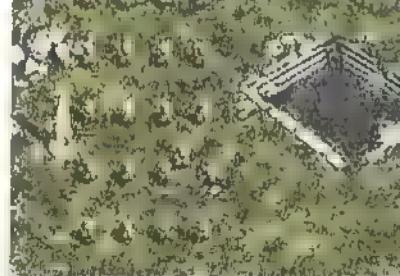
Can Bruce fend off Tom's Hot Elf? Will Tom be late for his date? Answers below!



Tom: We like to play the Fortress victory condition so that the winner (most likely me) doesn't have to hunt down every last one of Bruce's peons. Instead, the game ends when one player (most likely me) destroys Bruce's last keep. My plan is to use the plaugelords to conduct a surgical strike with spores, ending the game quickly.

Bruce: Fantasy units make me itchy. Half the races in this game never even existed in historical times, and most of the units are completely incomprehensible to me. What is a spaarg? Exactly. Because of this, I choose the Empire, which has pretty normal units such as pikemen, halberdiers, and archers at least at the beginning. Later on, you get eagles, which I guess are pretty obvious, and griffons, which are, too, but not quite as much. My strategy will be to tell the halberdiers and archers to do whatever it was they did in ancient history, including any secret tricks that may have appeared in the strategy guides of the time.

Tom: I wanted to bring in Smiles McGee, my 32nd level daemon summoner, with his full set of Lysean magic items, but Bruce



Tom's spores prepare for a Bill Parcells attack

said it would put him at a disadvantage. He's already at an enormous disadvantage because I'm better at real-time strategy games, so I've relented. Smiles McGee will stay at home, and we'll use temporary 20th-level heroes.

In the world of *Warlords*, your hero's charisma reduces the cost of things. So I will build a hero who is so doggone beautiful that everything will be dirt cheap. I choose a high elf, not necessarily because I'm into that sort of thing but because they have an inherent charisma boost from generations of fantasy writers who think elves are hot. I



Bruce's towers and archers make quick work of Tom's spores.

then spend all 20 stat points raising his charisma to 26. I make the elf a merchant and spend all 20 skill points raising his merchant skill to 23. The end result is someone who's so incredibly hot that he gets a 47 percent discount on everything. I name him Hot Elf.

By the way, using the game's rules, I've extrapolated the price that various people will pay for a copy of *Battlecry III*, which has an MSRP of \$29.99. Here's how it breaks down: Brad Pitt, \$14.27; Me, \$29.99; Tammy Faye Messner nee Bakker, \$42.15; Bruce, \$1,872.09. Ha ha! There's nothing like using a game's rules to help with the whole trash-talking thing.

Bruce: This system of making "temporary heroes" is uncomfortably like rolling up a *D&D* character—plus, it turns out that Tom already has a *D&D* character he wants to

I tell Tom to make whatever type of hero lets you use one of the portraits of a woman with big breasts.

Tom
Last month
Tom kicked Bruce's arse
from here to the Stone
Age in *Rise of Nations*
Thrones & Patriots

Bruce
Last month
Bruce pretended
Rise of Nations b
ally watched TV
by *Age of Empires*



use. He even has some clever name he probably used way back in eighth grade. Whatever I tell him to put Smiley Face away and make whatever kind of hero lets you use one of the portraits of a woman with big breasts. That will put Tom in a good mood, so if he loses, he might not get quite so mad.

I choose a healer because 90 percent of the spells in this game require some sort of strategy, and if you click on them one second too late, they're useless and you lose. With healing spells, you always know when you need them, and as long as all your units aren't dead yet, you figure they could use some healing. I crank up his spells so that he can learn as many healing spells as possible and give him some kind of morale-boosting thing. Tom tells me that morale is important, based on his extensive experience with Napoleonic miniatures.

Tom: After using Hot Elf to explore the map, I see that it's virtually barren. There are only crystal mines in the two unoccupied corners. Otherwise, we're left with our starting resources. This scarcity of resources is an enormous boon for me since I get a discount for being so hot. I start building up my keep so that I can build spores and the casket, which improves their explosive power. There's a temple in the middle, but the reward for a quest is just extra crystals. Bah. Hot Elf turns up his handsome nose at the offer. He's got better things to do.

Bruce: One of the really annoying things about this game is that it makes you go on quests. Not only am I supposed to manage an incredibly complex series of builds to make a finely tuned military machine out of pterodactyl nests, but I also have to baby-sit my hero all around the map, looking for some other hero to kill because a sage in some building wants it that way. Why can't this be like *Majesty*, in which you just tell your heroes to go do their business so you can go watch the Pistons game? On the positive side, none of the quests have backstories or dialogue choices or anything like that. My first quest is easy: I give up 500 stone and get some stuff. I have no idea if I just got ripped off.

Tom: I've gotten up to Virus IV, which gives spore explosions +20 damage. I've

researched Speed of Oros to make spores faster. Meanwhile, I've had two Temples of Eyes cranking out the actual spores, which are these ugly floating eyeball-type things that will glide past Bruce's towers and level his keep. I carefully move them to the perimeter of his base, working my way around the map to assemble them just west of his starting point. Once they're all there in formation, I'll press past his defensive towers.

Bruce: I like playing the Empire for one reason, elephants. Another, more complex reason that didn't make the cut for this one-item list is that there aren't any weird magicks or thaumaturgies or whatnot. You research +6 combat for your pikemen, and your pikemen get +6 combat. It's genius. If I have to read the unit information for some half-man, half-palypus thing to figure out what it does, your game has too much backstory.

Tom's evil balloons

Bruce: A case in point is some weird balloons that Tom seems to be collecting just outside my base. Unlike dwarves, elves, and half-orcs, I can't just deduce what weird floating balloon monsters do based on my experiences with them in real life. In the end, I decide that since they're Tom's monsters, I should kill them. In a brilliant nod to real world physics making gaming more realistic, it turns out that my pikemen do extra damage against scary balloons. Or any balloons, I guess.

Tom: That could have gone better. OK, so much for the surgical virus-bomb strike. Time for plan B. Which means I have to think of a plan B. Normally the plague lords can wipe up early on by buffing the ghouls, but I think I've missed the window of

opportunity for this. I'm going to my unbelievable hotness to build army. My zombies start laying piles to boost my army size, while cesspools crank out slimes and s out of spite. I'm going to set my Eyes to "rampant" and set them producing spores that will search for things to blow up on. Hoping really annoying for Bruce to keep these exploding diseased eyeballs.

Bruce: This whole thing is getting annoying, which I strongly suspect what Tom wants. I'm not a big building defensive walls and towers all know how much that he French, but the few I got auto seem to be helping quite a bit more. Then I find out that units in the towers and the towers extra range and superpowers. If you put an Empire white tower, the tower does lightning. That's excellent. I stick mages towers and position archers in front. Thanks to the excellent programming done by the *Warlords Battlecry III*, once I'm done attacking, they go back to positions I put them in, ready to attack. Meanwhile, I'm building and elephants.



Tom: Tom's hero turns the tide against a horde of elephants.

Tom: OK, what we're seeing now is a sort of re-creation of the Cold War. Bruce is America, with smaller numbers but superior quality. I'm the Soviet Union, quickly cranking out masses of cheap units that die and get replaced, only instead of being helmed by a bald old Russian, there's a really sexy elf dude in charge. Otherwise, it's kind of realistic in that Bruce is beating me back. Time to invest in a little quality. I've advanced to the point where I can build hydras to counter his elephants. Now I'm upgrading my hydra cave to a fire cave. This will give me pyrohydras as well as Eyes of Fire, missile units that spit fiery death at Bruce's units. Hopefully, this will even things out a bit.

Bruce: Back in the 1980s, Reagan-hater Tom scoffed at the idea of a missile shield that would keep our great country safe from invaders coming from the planet of Cydonia. Now it turns out that this technology has been available since ancient even times. It also works really well. Anytime an enemy units anywhere near this medieval strategic-defense initiative, it just vanishes in a hail of smart pebbles. Or magic. It's all the same thing.

el my disease

Tom: I've tried a couple of plague-priest de missions, but it's hard to get them enough to do their job. My priests can sniff a plague cloud, which will infect his army with terrible diseases, made all more potent by the half-dozen plague 've built. This will lower the speed and at value of anyone who fails his nice check. Bruce will have an army of 19, wheezing knights who feel too sick. But he won't come out from behind in towers. He's playing defensively, throwing my armies into killing zones sits back and laughs. Since neither particularly concerned about these crystal mines in the corners, map isn't really a priority here. Which is the kind of computer game I usually do nothing, while my towers shoot some lightning

or fireballs or something and fry whatever bizarre, ahistorical monster Tom foolishly decided to send against the Empire. Why would you decide to mess with the Empire? It just doesn't make sense.

Tom: My titan is a green half-snake guy with horns named Antharg. I'm sick of hearing his name. Every time my Temple of Eyes trains a new unit, some chick moans, "The eye of Antharg is upon you." It's almost annoying enough to dissuade me from training any units. But now that he's here, it's time to put him to use.

Bruce: Way back in the day, when Tom was part of the nuclear freeze movement, the Soviets built a supersecret interceptor called the MiG-25 Foxbat. NATO thought that it was some kind of superplane capable of shooting down our bombers before Jimmy Carter even had a chance to cancel their production. Then Viktor Belenko defected to Japan with one in 1976, and it turned out that it was just a crappy pile of cast iron that couldn't even shoot down one of those dwarf helicopters from *WarCraft III*. Do you see where I'm going with this? Tom must have gotten his titan confused with the titans in *Age of Mythology*, who actually kick ass. This titan dies in about 30 seconds to the fireball-shooting, lightning-throwing ramparts of freedom and democracy: my towers.

Tom: I didn't expect to lose my titan that fast, and while I did take down one of Bruce's towers, this leaves me with no more überweapons (you can build only one titan per game), and Bruce has yet to unleash his. Plus, his little peons rebuild the tower I destroyed before I can chase them away. His base is starting to look impregnable.

Bruce: If Tom can have a titan, I guess I can have one, too. And now mine is ready. It's some kind of chariot thing. I can't even figure out which way the front is supposed to be. Using very sophisticated military tactics I learned from books about Erwin Rommel, I lasso all my units and click on the middle of

Tom's base. I also manage to convert a few mines in that area, giving me a much-needed resource boost and hopefully slowing Tom down even further.

Tom: Bruce must be taking RTS lessons from somebody, because he managed to wipe out my forward keep and the



Tom: Bruce's units frolic in his impregnable fortress.

towers I had built in the middle of the map before I finally counterattacked with some wyverns, killed his titan, and chased his elephants and griffons away. Now, neither one of us has a titan. Unfortunately, one of us has a date tonight, and believe me. It's not Bruce. I was hoping to have cleaned this whole thing up half an hour ago. Now I'm going to have to sit back while I rebuild my army. Maybe I should call to change my dinner reservation.

Dragon breath

Bruce: Remember how way back about 10 million words ago, I mentioned that I was building dragons? Well, they're almost done. It takes just about forever to build one—fortunately, I have four separate dragon-building things. Actually, only my first dragon is almost done. The last one should be ready by the time you're reading the next Tom vs. Bruce article. Still, with Tom's titan dead and his resources severely reduced, I can afford to wait. The arms race has shifted decisively in my favor. Take that, Gorby...I mean, Tom Chick!

After a few meaningless skirmishes among the ruins of Tom's forward base convince me that his plagues are hibernating or otherwise indisposed, I deploy my massive strike force: four dragons, six elephants, and a horde of mages, halberdiers, archers, and mercenaries, backed up by all the flaming arrows and armor-enhancing research I can muster. Amazingly, Tom's towers still take a huge chunk out of my army, but I destroy enough of his base (and continue to convert his now-vulnerable peripheral mines) that I can rebuild my army much faster than he can rebuild his (especially with the harassing force I use to keep him from rebuilding towers). Unfortunately, this is going to take at least another half an hour, and I get the idea from Tom that he has something a lot more important lined up for tonight than playing a computer game. No problem. Tom resigns, and the free world is safe for another month. ☒

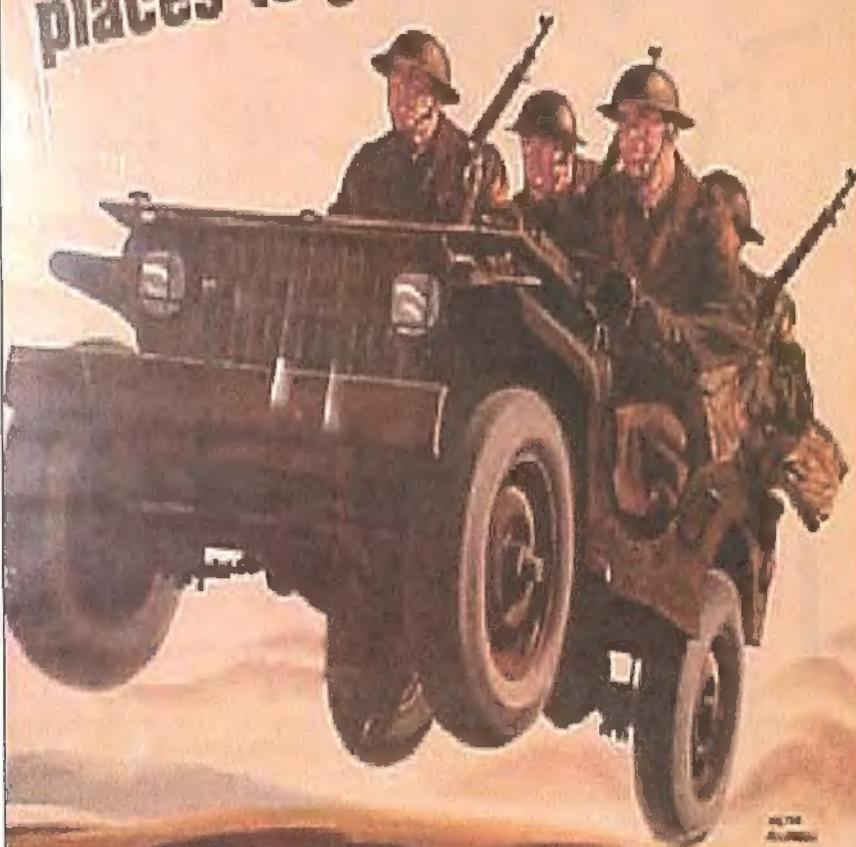


My last dragon should be ready by the time you're reading the next Tom vs. Bruce article.

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I'm Al Haig!

With great power comes epically disturbing irresponsibility

Ladies and gentlemen—and whatever you are, Ryan Scott—there's a new sheriff in town. Editor-in-chief Jeff Green is off for two weeks in France with his fromage-hugging spouse, and CGW's default leader is none other than yours truly. Meet the new boss, same as the old boss...except wearing slippers made out of puppies.

Finally, I get to enact the sort of changes that the current petticoat-wearing and *Evita*-warbling CGW leadership has been too timid to implement. There's more than one way to skin a cat (each equally delightful), and it's time CGW made the sort of bold changes other gaming mags haven't had the cojones to make. For example: Why do we only cover games that actually exist? Why aren't we covering games that are made up—or, more specifically, why aren't we covering games that exist only in my head?

So look for our big cover story on *The Commuter Train Game* next month. What is *The Commuter Train Game*, you ask? Only the best game ever. Without spoiling our mind-blowing, exclusive, superscoop, blowout, gigantor, megalomaniacal cover ultrafeature, *The Commuter Train Game* features robust single- and multiplayer play and is great for mods, letting it quickly morph into *The ATM Line Game*, *The Elevator Up Game*, *The Elevator Down Game*, and—for the truly hardcore—*The Bus Depot Restroom at 2 a.m. Game*. The rules are simple: If my commuter train were suddenly transported to a desert island and/or an alternate reality, who in this commuter train car would I choose as my mate? See? Incredibly addictive! Simple to play, hard to master! I play this game all day, every day, and I think it's time to share it with the world. (On a personal note: If after trying this game for three days you'd like to enjoy *The Commuter Train Game* on an unlimited basis, please send me the requisite \$39.95 registration fee, and I'll send you a code to unlock not only the source game, but also its most popular mod, *The Lap Dancer Club Game*, and the insanely challenging *Stuck on a Slow Greyhound Bus to Barstow With a Truly Alarming Number of Hypnotically Ugly People Game*.)

What other changes are in store? Well, a keening, soul-piercing scream will come from my office every hour on the half hour, during which I will be dancing around dressed as a fez-wearing monkey. This won't help the magazine all that



I...a keening, soul-piercing scream will come from my office every hour on the half hour, during which I will be dancing around dressed as a fez-wearing monkey.

much—OK, it won't help it at all—but it will help me blow off a little steam, and since Jeff won't be around to fire me after he collapses in a dead faint, what the heck, y'know? But that's an internal thing, like the new requirement that the edit staff stuff their socks with cheese, and what you're wondering is, "What will I, Joe Average Reader, see that's new and exciting when I leaf through CGW during the downtime while peeping in the neighbor's bathroom window?" Glad you asked, Joe Average Reader.

For one thing, every issue of CGW will include a single-use pack of antibacterial ointment. Why? Have you looked at yourself lately? Seriously, dude, c'mon. We're doing both you and what I like to call Humanity At Large a favor with this one. Warts, blisters, weeping sores—whatever those things are, it's high time you did something about them. In a couple of months, we'll start a special series of lifestyle-enhancement articles, focusing

especially on fashion. I know, you'd like this crucial fashion advice immediately, but we're holding off because 1) you need the time to scab over and 2) have you seen the way we dress? Johnny Liu ain't so bad, but he sweats actual meat, which might be placing limitations on his clothing options, limitations that you shouldn't have to endure.

Other big changes include expanding the opening editorial from two paragraphs to 32 pages, during which I will delight you with witty Capote-esque anecdotes detailing my celebrity encounters with the likes of Andy Warhol, Iggy Pop, Wendy O. Williams, and Ving Rhames, and the CD-ROM will be filled with recordings of me reading my novella *What's That Smell?*

Granted, Jeff is gone but two weeks, so I have a woefully limited window of opportunity to enact these improvements, but it is my fervent hope that this wretch can indeed exceed his grasp. You'll be better off.

■ Robert Coffey robert_coffey@ziffdavis.com

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